DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 438 386 UD 033 359

TITLE	AdvoCasey: Documenting Programs That Work for Kids and Families, 1999-2000.
INSTITUTION	Annie E. Casey Foundation, Baltimore, MD.
PUB DATE	2000-00-00
NOTE	114p.; Issued three times per year.
AVAILABLE FROM	The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 701 St. Paul Street, Baltimore, MD 21202. For full text: http://www.aecf.org/publications.
PUB TYPE	Collected Works - Serials (022)
JOURNAL CIT	AdvoCasey; v1 n1-3 Spr 1999-Fall 1999/Win 2000
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC05 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Charter Schools; *Child Welfare; Educational Administration; Elementary Secondary Education; Foreign Countries; Foster Care; Foster Family; *Job Training; *Juvenile Justice; Low Income Groups; Prevention; Program Descriptions; State Programs; Tax Credits; Therapy; *Urban Schools; Urban Youth; *Violence; Welfare Recipients
IDENTIFIERS	Canada; Iowa; Massachusetts; Minnesota; *Reform Efforts; Texas; *Welfare Reform

ABSTRACT

This periodical provides accessible, in-depth profiles of programs and policies that have made measurable differences in the lives of children and families. A particular focus is on initiatives that have helped reform child-serving institutions and systems and that have strengthened the physical infrastructure, economic vitality, and social fabric of distressed neighborhoods. Although coverage is not limited to projects funded by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, such projects predominate because of the detailed information available. The first issue contains the following articles: (1) "Decat in the Hat: Iowa's Successful First Step toward Devolving Resources, Responsibility, and Accountability for Child and Family Outcomes" (Bill Rust); (2) "'Becky': A Case Study in Wraparound Services"; (3) "Punish 'Em, Fix 'Em, Make 'Em Go Away: Multisystemic Therapy Has a Better Idea" (Patrice Pascual); (4) "Promises To Keep: Autonomy and Accountability in Massachusetts Charter Schools" (Bill Rust); (5) "Organizing for Education: The Alliance Schools in Texas" (Patrice Pascual); (6) "A Tale of Two Cities: The Jobs Initiative in Milwaukee and St. Louis" (Michael deCourcy Hinds); and (7) "Research and Evaluation Notes: Recent Evaluations of Initiatives That Improve Child and Family Outcomes, Reform Institutions, and Strengthen Communities." The second issue contains the following articles: (1) "'Above Average' Welfare Reform: The Minnesota Family Investment Program" (Bill Rust); (2) "New Hope for Low-Income Workers: Improving Economic and Child Outcomes in Milwaukee" (Bill Rust); (3) "Canadian Doubles: Employment, Income, and Other Impacts of the Self-Sufficiency Project" (Bill Rust); (4) "Tax Relief for Working Poor Families: State Earned Income Tax Credits" (Bill Rust); and (5) "Assessing Welfare Reform: Recent Reports from the Urban Institute" (Michael deCourcy Hinds). The third issue includes: (1) "More Foster Families, Fewer Children Entering Care: Rebuilding Family Foster Care in Cuyahoga and Anne Arundel Counties" (Patrice Pascual); (2) "The Graduates: The Casey Family Services Alumni Study" (Kristin Coffey); (3) "'Quitting a Beef': A Violence-Free Zone in Washington, D.C." (Rose Gutfeld); and (4)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

"Juvenile Jailhouse Rocked: Reforming Detention in Chicago, Portland, and Sacramento" (Bill Rust). (SLD)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

ED 438 386

AdvoCasey: Documenting Programs That Work for Kids and Families, 1999-2000.

Volume 1, Numbers 1-3

Spring 1999 – Fall 1999/Winter 2000

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND
DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS
BEEN GRANTED BY

W. J. Rust

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES
INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION
CENTER (ERIC)

- ☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
- ☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

- Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

UD033359

U.S. DEPARTMENT
FOOD CO
VALUE

C

Documenting Programs That Work for Kids and Families

A Publication of the Annie E. Casey Foundation | Summer 1999 | Volume One | Number Two

"ABOVE AVERAGE" WELFARE REFORM

THE MINNESOTA FAMILY INVESTMENT PROGRAM

NEW HOPE FOR LOW-INCOME WORKERS

IMPROVING ECONOMIC AND CHILD OUTCOMES IN MILWAUKEE

CANADIAN DOUBLES

EMPLOYMENT, INCOME, AND OTHER IMPACTS OF THE SELF-SUFFICIENCY PROJECT

TAX RELIEF FOR WORKING POOR FAMILIES

STATE EARNED INCOME TAX CREDITS

ASSESSING WELFARE REFORM

RECENT REPORTS FROM THE URBAN INSTITUTE

2A

PAGE 2: REWARDING WORK, REDUCING POVERTY

By Douglas W. Nelson

The Casey Foundation has been an advocate for reforming welfare for a long time now. Like many others, we recognized that Aid to Families With Dependent Children did not work for many, if not most, welfare families. It left too many children in deep poverty, it stigmatized too many young parents, it exacerbated tensions between the working poor and the welfare poor, and, for some, it fostered an intergenerational acceptance of dependence.

Knowing that something is broken and fixing it are, of course, two different things. Three years ago the federal government ended "welfare as we know it." And throughout the 1990s states have been crafting a variety of work-based alternatives aimed at making access to earnings a substitute for long-term reliance on entitlement assistance. Aided by a robust economy and a strong demand for workers, we have managed to reduce caseloads and move significant numbers of families from welfare to work.

While these early results should be viewed with optimism, they should not obscure the looming challenges that still face policymakers at the state and federal levels. The central reform challenge continues to revolve around the question of whether we can make "working" truly serve the best interests of low-skilled parents, their children, the economy, and taxpayers. More plainly, can we make job holding an affordable way of enabling more poor families to raise their children well?

It is this core question that imparts such significance to a host of program and policy experiments that seek to encourage, subsidize, and support work effort. By combining earnings and publicly funded supplements, these financial incentives are designed to motivate job holding, enhance earnings, and improve the material well-being of low-income families. As of this writing, there is growing evidence that such financial incentives really can deliver on their hoped-for goals of stimulating work effort, reducing poverty, and enhancing family well-being.

The encouraging data on the impact of financial incentives have prompted us to devote the entire Summer 1999 issue of ADVOCASEY to this subject. The first three stories, which are based on the latest evaluations and interviews with policymakers, researchers, and program operators, profile different approaches to providing work incentives: the Minnesota Family Investment Program, the New Hope Project in Milwaukee, and the Self-Sufficiency Project in Canada. The results from these projects are particularly noteworthy because of their rigorous random-assignment evaluations.

The fourth story examines an emerging trend to enact or expand state-level Earned Income Tax Credits, which increase the net income of working poor families. These credits complement the federal Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), a financial incentive that was enacted in the 1970s and expanded by the Reagan, Bush, and Clinton administrations. Like the national EITC, state earned income credits have received support from across the political spectrum.

> THERE IS GROWING EVIDENCE THAT FINANCIAL INCENTIVES CAN DELIVER ON THEIR HOPED-FOR GOALS OF STIMULATING WORK EFFORT, REDUCING POVERTY, AND ENHANCING FAMILY WELL-BEING.

This issue of ADVOCASEY concludes with a summary of recent welfare-reform research from the Assessing the New Federalism project. Well before the enactment of federal welfare-reform legislation, states were experimenting with new ways of providing assistance to disadvantaged children and families. Moreover, the responsibility for the social safety net was shifting from the federal government to the states. In response to these developments, the Casey Foundation asked the Urban Institute, a nonpartisan policy research organization in Washington, D.C., to develop the Assessing the New Federalism project. The intent of this multifaceted research initiative is to help policymakers and others distinguish effective state innovations from those less likely to improve outcomes for children and families.

In calling attention to financial incentives, we do not mean to suggest that they are the only determinant of welfare reform's ultimate success or failure. Serious questions remain about whether we can find meaningful work opportunities for the least job ready of welfare recipients — many of whom are still on the rolls. Similarly, we don't yet know the best approaches for maximizing job retention and earnings continuity for new labor-force entrants, especially if labor demand slackens in future years.

But, in our view, these longer-term challenges will only be worth addressing if we first assure that job holding and work effort actually provide under-skilled young parents a bona fide opportunity to do better by their children. The exciting suggestion in the approaches profiled in this issue is that we just might be able to secure that opportunity.

As always, I welcome your comments and suggestions.

Douglas W. Nelson is the president of the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

C

DOCUMENTING PROGRAMS THAT WORK FOR KIDS AND FAMILIES

TABLE OF CONTENTS

VOLUME ONE | NUMBER TWO | SUMMER 1999

"ABOVE AVERAGE" WELFARE REFORM 4
THE MINNESOTA FAMILY INVESTMENT PROGRAM

NEW HOPE FOR LOW-INCOME WORKERS 12
IMPROVING ECONOMIC AND CHILD OUTCOMES IN MILWAUKEE

CANADIAN DOUBLES 17
EMPLOYMENT, INCOME, AND OTHER IMPACTS OF THE SELF-SUFFICIENCY PROJECT

TAX RELIEF FOR WORKING POOR FAMILIES 22
STATE EARNED INCOME TAX CREDITS

ASSESSING WELFARE REFORM 27
RECENT REPORTS FROM THE URBAN INSTITUTE

ADVOCASEY *is published by the Annie E. Casey Foundation's Office of External Affairs. Material may be reprinted with appropriate acknowledgment. Articles are also available online at www.aecf.org.*

The Annie E. Casey Foundation is a private charitable organization dedicated to helping build better futures for disadvantaged children in the United States. The primary mission of the Foundation is to foster public policies, human-service reforms, and community supports that more effectively meet the needs of today's vulnerable children and families. In pursuit of this goal, the Foundation makes grants that help states, cities, and neighborhoods fashion more innovative, cost-effective responses to these needs.

The Annie E. Casey Foundation was established in 1948 by Jim Casey, one of the founders of United Parcel Service, and his siblings, who named the Foundation in honor of their mother.

"ABOVE AVERAGE" WELFARE

By Bill Rust

A proposal for deep reductions in welfare benefits to poor families paralyzed the Minnesota legislature in 1986. A majority in the state House of Representatives, charging that low-income people migrated to Minnesota because of its relatively generous public-assistance programs, wanted to slash welfare benefits by 30 percent. The state Senate flatly rejected such steep cuts.

To help resolve the deadlock, then Gov. Rudy Perpich established the Minnesota Commission on Welfare Reform to examine benefit levels and other aspects of state public assistance. The first meeting of this bipartisan commission, which included government officials and nonprofit leaders, began inauspiciously, with divergent political views and conflicting opinions surfacing quickly. "People were kind of talking past each other," recalls Joel Kvamme, then a staffer to the commission from the Minnesota Department of Human Services. "It was very ideological."

Determined to reach a consensus, the commission members agreed to table their preconceptions and immerse themselves in the facts about welfare in Minnesota. Why do families apply for public assistance? How long do they stay on welfare? How do families manage to leave the program?

Embodying a traditional Midwestern faith in reliable information informing enlightened social policy, the commission conducted a six-month inquiry that included testimony from experts, service providers, and welfare recipients; public hearings throughout the state; and an examination of reform options as well as the data and values that supported them. On Dec. 1, 1986, the commission submitted a report to the governor that transformed a narrow, partisan debate about appropriate benefit levels into a thoughtful consensus on comprehensive welfare reform. Foreshadowing the federal legislation enacted a decade later, the commission unanimously concluded: "THE OLD AFDC INCOME-MAINTENANCE PROGRAM MUST END [emphasis in original]."

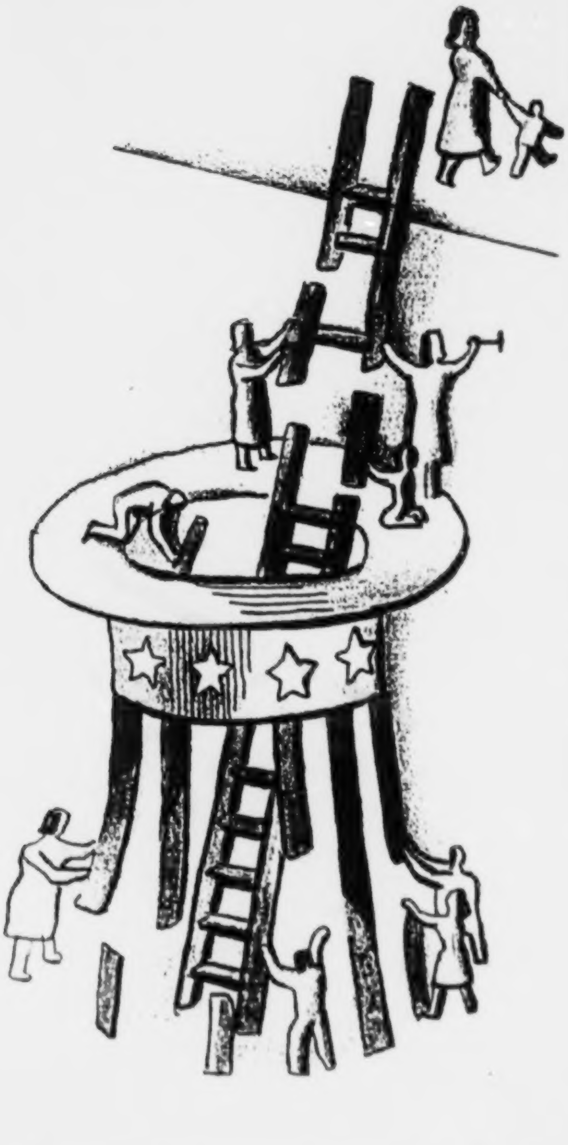
Although many social programs might accurately be characterized as "welfare," the federal-state cash-assistance program called "Aid to Families With Dependent Children" had been at the heart of all efforts to reform public assistance. Created by the Social Security Act of 1935, AFDC evolved from a New Deal initiative designed primarily to support the children of widowed mothers, who were not expected to work, to a program that served divorced mothers, never-married mothers, and other clients. As increasing numbers of women and mothers began working outside the home, the program sought to achieve multiple — often conflicting — goals that included reducing poverty, dependency, and costs. By the 1980s most policymakers, citizens, and welfare recipients themselves believed that AFDC was doing a poor job in one or more of these areas.

A key finding of the Minnesota welfare commission was that about 60 percent of the state's AFDC recipients used public assistance in a way that most people would deem appropriate — a temporary boost to help families in trouble return to the economic mainstream. On the other hand, about 40 percent of welfare families were long-term users. Within this group, the majority were able bodied but appeared to lack either the education, experience, or motivation to be self-sufficient. In the view of the welfare commission, it was this group of long-term recipients who should be the focus of welfare reform.

The commission also voiced concerns about the federal AFDC rule requiring that each dollar earned by a welfare recipient be matched by an equivalent reduction in benefits. When combined with child-care costs, transportation, and other employment expenses, these benefit reductions meant that many recipients found themselves financially worse off by working than if they remained on welfare. The commission urged that "incentives to exit the system should always be greater than those to remain on welfare."

The Minnesota welfare commission's pragmatic approach to reforming welfare was accompanied by an

THE GOAL: MOVING WELFARE RECIPIENTS OFF OF PUBLIC ASSISTANCE AND OUT OF POVERTY.



equally realistic, if politically less palatable, corollary: It would take "substantial expenditures 'up front'" to reform AFDC totally, and it would be years before savings from such reform could be recovered.

Although hailed in Minnesota as a "philosophical breakthrough," the recommendations of the welfare commission were, for the most part, not acted upon immediately. Some required waivers from federal regulations, and others were deemed too expensive for a state then facing a substantial budget deficit.

On the other hand, the analysis of the Minnesota welfare commission had a profound long-range impact on the state's thinking about welfare reform. Its recommendations provided the philosophical foundation of one of the most ambitious and successful welfare-reform initiatives of the 1990s — one that "expects, supports, and rewards work" and that has the explicit goal of moving recipients off of public assistance and out of poverty — the Minnesota Family Investment Program (MFIP).

"Reliable Evidence"

MFIP, pronounced "M-fip" by state officials, researchers, and others, is one of a new generation of public policies and programs called "financial incentives." Intended to "make work pay," financial incentives seek to reduce poverty by supplementing the earnings of low-income people who work. MFIP, which reverses a "perverse incentive" of AFDC, rewards welfare recipients more for working than not working.

Using both "carrots" and "sticks" to encourage work, MFIP enables recipients to mix earnings and public assistance and requires participation in job-related and training activities. The program has had particular success in boosting the employment and earnings of long-term welfare recipients in urban areas. Eighteen months after entering the program, according to an evaluation by the Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation (MDRC), the employment rate for these MFIP participants was nearly 40 percent higher than a comparison group that received traditional welfare services.

"[The] employment and earnings impacts are among the largest produced by previously studied welfare-to-work programs," wrote the authors of *Making Welfare Work and Work Pay*, MDRC's interim evaluation of MFIP. "The impacts are also notable given that long-term recipients represent the most disadvantaged segment of the welfare population."

Although MDRC's final report will not be available until early next year, the evidence from MFIP and other financial-incentive programs indicates that it is possible to balance the competing goals of reducing dependency, raising living standards, and controlling costs. "We don't know whether this encouraging information from MFIP, SSP [the Canadian Self-Sufficiency Project, see page 17], and other incentive programs will hold up over time," says Gordon L. Berlin, a senior vice president at MDRC and author of a forthcoming monograph on financial incentives.[1] "But if it does, we will have very reliable evidence that policies can help long-term welfare recipients work more, increase their income, and even get out of poverty."

Marketing Work

Following years of planning and discussion by policymakers, researchers, and advocates, MFIP finally began on April 1, 1994, as a major "waiver" demonstration in seven Minnesota counties. In the 1990s many states received waivers from federal AFDC rules and regulations to experiment with new forms of public assistance. As part of the waiver agreements with the federal government, the state demonstration programs were rigorously evaluated to determine their effectiveness.

To assess the impact of MFIP, the state of Minnesota hired MDRC, a nonpartisan research organization established in 1974, to help design and manage the evaluation. Some 9,000 people were randomly assigned by computer to either an experimental group that received MFIP benefits or to a control group that enrolled in the traditional AFDC program. Researchers further divided caseloads into new applicants who received financial incentives only and long-term recipients who received incentives and participated in mandatory job-related activities.

Comparing these groups enabled researchers to measure not only the impact of MFIP compared with AFDC, but also the relative effects of just financial incentives and the incentives plus mandatory work requirements. "The Minnesota evaluation is the only one to date that lets you break the pieces apart," says Rebecca M. Blank, who recently concluded a two-year term as a member of the President's Council of Economic Advisers and is now dean of the School of Public Policy at the University of Michigan.

USING BOTH "CARROTS" AND "STICKS" TO ENCOURAGE WORK, MFIP ENABLES RECIPIENTS TO MIX EARNINGS AND PUBLIC ASSISTANCE AND REQUIRES PARTICIPATION IN JOB-RELATED AND TRAINING ACTIVITIES.

MFIP's financial incentives included a 20 percent increase in the basic welfare grant for recipients who were employed. Moreover, welfare benefits were reduced by only 62 cents for every dollar earned, instead of the nearly dollar-for-dollar reduction under AFDC. "The objective," in the words of the MDRC evaluation, "is to increase the incentive recipients have to work and to make those who work better off."

---

[1] *Encouraging Work, Reducing Poverty: The Impact of Work Incentive Programs*, Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation, Fall 1999.

To reduce poverty, participants in the MFIP demonstration mixed earnings and declining amounts of welfare until their income reached 140 percent of the federal poverty standard — a total in 1997 of $22,960 per year for a family of four. At this point, their welfare grant was eliminated. Other features of MFIP that facilitated the transition to work were the direct payment of child-care expenses to providers and the consolidation of other state and federal assistance programs into a single cash grant.

Long-term welfare recipients in the MFIP experimental group who worked less than 30 hours per week were required to participate in employment and training services. These recipients, under penalty of a 10 percent loss of welfare benefits, had to attend meetings with job counselors, document job-search or training efforts, and turn in check stubs from part-time work.

MFIP's financial incentives and work requirements were reinforced by a deliberate effort to "market" the program to welfare recipients. At eligibility-verification meetings with caseworkers and monthly meetings with employment trainers, as well as by mail and by phone, recipients received a consistent message that they would be financially better off by working rather than remaining on public assistance.

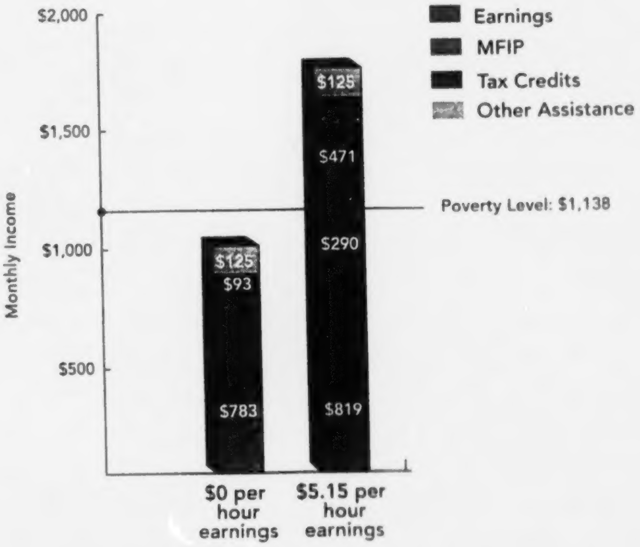
The MFIP marketing efforts also increased caseworkers' enthusiasm for the program and their efforts to promote work to clients. "In MFIP, welfare caseworkers were able to sell work in way they were never really able to before," says Virginia Knox, MDRC's principal investigator for the demonstration. "The staff now could look you in the eye and honestly say that you would be better off if you went to work, something they could seldom say before."

Increasing Employment, Reducing Poverty

At the end of the 18-month follow-up period, MFIP helped long-term welfare recipients living in Minneapolis and surrounding counties post a nearly 40 percent increase in employment over the AFDC control group. Over that same period, the MFIP group had a 27 percent increase in earnings. The

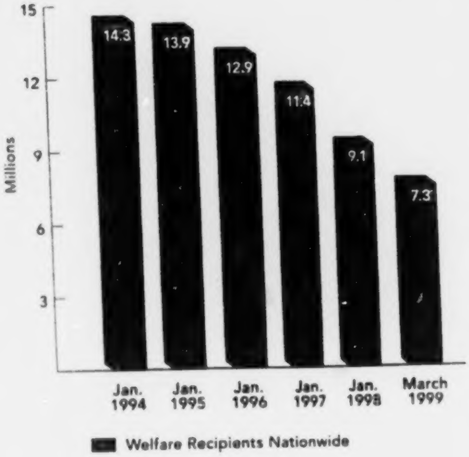
MAKING WORK PAY IN MINNESOTA

This chart compares the monthly income of two hypothetical Minnesota families (one adult, two children in each). The income of the family on the left, which is derived solely from the Minnesota Family Investment Program and other public assistance, is 88 percent of the poverty level. The income of the working family, which combines earnings and public assistance, is 150 percent of the poverty level.



Source: Minnesota Department of Human Services

By the Numbers:
Declining Welfare Rolls



NEW FEDERAL AND STATE POLICIES — combined with an economic expansion of unusual strength and duration — have contributed to dramatic reductions in public-assistance caseloads. According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, welfare rolls nationwide are at their lowest level since 1969, and the number of recipients has fallen by 49 percent since 1994.

The sharp reductions in welfare caseloads, some analysts say, have demonstrated the effectiveness of tough financial sanctions for recipients who do not comply with work, job-search, and related requirements. A recent report by the Heritage Foundation found that "differences in state welfare policies — specifically stringent sanctions and immediate work requirements — are highly associated with rapid rates of caseload decline."

Many other researchers, however, consider such reasoning a circular analysis of a single dimension of welfare reform. All a state has to do to reduce caseloads, they say, is immediately drop people from welfare rolls for noncompliance with required activities or make it difficult for eligible beneficiaries to qualify for public assistance. "It's not hard to reduce your caseload," says David Ellwood of Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government. "The real challenge is can you replace welfare and reduce poverty."

higher earnings and welfare benefits contributed to substantial poverty reductions, with almost twice as many of these recipients having incomes at or above the poverty line than the comparison group. MDRC evaluators concluded that it was "MFIP's combination of financial incentives and mandatory employment-focused activities — delivered with a reinforced incentive message — that achieved the goals of increased employment and reduced poverty."

Somewhat less impressive were the results for the welfare applicants — a group that received incentives only and were not yet required to participate in employment-related activities. Although MFIP produced increases in income and reductions in poverty, these gains "came entirely from increased welfare payments," according to MDRC. There was only "a modest increase in employment and no increase in earnings." Researchers concluded that for applicants — who often have recent work experience, are generally more employable than long-term recipients, and tend to receive welfare for a short time then return to work — the financial incentives alone provided little additional encouragement for employment.

MFIP was least successful in rural areas. For long-term recipients, "MFIP produced no sustained increase in employment or earnings," evaluators concluded. MDRC researchers speculated that differences between urban and rural labor markets, combined with increased child-care and transportation challenges in rural areas, "may have influenced MFIP's effectiveness."

MDRC's final report on MFIP is scheduled for publication in early 2000. In addition to documenting whether the encouraging initial findings hold up over time, the new report will provide a comprehensive analysis of MFIP's costs and benefits. "The short-term results," says Gordon Berlin, "show that the financial incentives increased welfare caseloads and costs somewhat because MFIP allowed recipients to mix work and welfare, some of

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

> "THE OBJECTIVE IS TO INCREASE THE INCENTIVE RECIPIENTS HAVE TO WORK AND TO MAKE THOSE WHO WORK BETTER OFF."

whom would have left the rolls for low-wage jobs."

The final evaluation, which is funded by a variety of private and public donors,[2] will also measure the impact of MFIP on child and family outcomes. Says Virginia Knox: "If it turns out that this program not only reduces poverty but also improves maternal mental health, family formation, and other measures of family well-being, there is certainly an argument that these effects might improve long-term outcomes for children and save society money."

MFIP Statewide

The landmark federal welfare law of 1996, officially called the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act, ended the 60-year federal guarantee of cash assistance for poor children. The much maligned AFDC program was replaced by Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), which provides states with a fixed amount of federal funding in exchange for more flexibility in designing their own public-assistance programs. A key feature of the law is a five-year lifetime limit on federal assistance to most families.

Minnesota responded to the federal legislation by using the MFIP waiver demonstration as the basis for a new statewide welfare program. Drawing on MDRC's preliminary research, the state legislature made a number of changes in the program. One finding suggested that it might be possible to increase the employment and earnings of welfare applicants by earlier exposure to the full MFIP strategy of financial incentives and mandatory participation in job-related and training activities. In the statewide program, the mandate for participating in such activities was moved up to no later than six months after the start of assistance. "Most counties do it about the third month of assistance," says Joel Kvamme.

Another change in the statewide MFIP program was a toughening of the sanctions for not complying with work requirements. The 10 percent benefit reduction in the demonstration escalated to 30 percent in the statewide initiative. According to Virginia Knox, caseworkers and DHS staff involved in the demonstration concluded that "for some families, a 10 percent sanction just wasn't serious enough to affect their behavior."

In addition to emphasizing immediate job placement and strengthening sanctions, Minnesota made other modifications to the demonstration, which reduced the cost of implementing MFIP statewide:

- welfare benefits are reduced by 64 cents for every dollar earned instead of 62 cents;
- employed recipients receive 110 percent of the basic welfare grant instead of 120 percent; and
- recipients "exit" the program when their incomes reach 120 percent of the federal poverty standard instead of 140 percent.

Perhaps the biggest difference between the MFIP demonstration and the statewide program is that the former had no "time limit" for program eligibility and the latter is operating under a five-year lifetime limit on assistance. In the demonstration, the message was unconditional: Do the right thing, go to work, and we will help you escape poverty. The new statewide program qualifies this guarantee with a time limit.

---

[2] In addition to the Annie E. Casey Foundation, funders for this evaluation are: the Minnesota Department of Human Services, the Ford Foundation, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the McKnight Foundation, the Northwest Area Foundation, and the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation.

"It's conceivable that families could work for years and years and not have enough earned income to escape poverty," says Dave Hage, an editorial writer for the Twin Cities *Star-Tribune* who has covered welfare reform for many years. "If the MFIP money is cut off after five years, they could fall back into very hard straits, even though they were doing everything the state asked them to do."

In 1997 the statewide MFIP program received a significant boost from the McKnight Foundation, a private philanthropic organization based in Minneapolis. Convinced that welfare reform was a community-wide responsibility, the foundation committed $20 million over two years, the great majority of which funded private-public partnerships to help families succeed in the work force. Serving virtually every county in Minnesota, the McKnight-sponsored partnerships included representatives from county government, business, nonprofit organizations, and other community institutions.

Using flexible foundation funds, the partnerships have been developing local strategies to fill gaps in such areas as child care, transportation, and mentoring. By working collaboratively, the partners have sought to reduce duplication and blend their services more effectively. "In some counties," says Michael O'Keefe, commissioner of the Department of Human Services and former president of the McKnight Foundation, "these partnerships have created extraordinary cooperation among social-service agencies, which is often difficult to get."

Without a Net?

Minnesota's statewide MFIP program, which went into effect on Jan. 1, 1998, is off to a promising start. During the last half of 1998, the proportion of families receiving welfare declined by about 1 percent per month. Over the same time period, there was an 8 percent increase in welfare families that were working.

As with national welfare reform, it is difficult to assess confidently the relative impact of the state's robust economy and its public-assistance policies. In April 1999 the seasonally adjusted unemployment rate in Minnesota was only 2.1 percent, the lowest ever recorded in the state. This figure is all the more remarkable when one recalls that economists recently considered an unemployment rate of 5 percent as "full employment."

Financially healthy, Minnesota has taken additional steps to strengthen its supports for working families. Although the Minnesota legislature recently defeated a bill to "stop the clock" on time limits for working welfare recipients by substituting state money for federal support, the state doubled the amount of funding for child-care subsidies for families moving from welfare to work. Minnesota also increased child-care subsidies to help low-income working families stay off welfare, providing assistance to about 3,000 of the 7,000 families on the state's waiting list.

Despite MFIP's success to date, there are looming challenges that concern policymakers, researchers, and advocates. Perhaps the most important question facing Minnesota is the same one that confronts every other state: What will be the impact of an economic recession on low-income families? "County as well as state officials are very concerned about a downturn in the economy, especially if one occurs at the end of the first five-year period, when many recipients will lose benefits," wrote the authors of an Urban Institute study on income support and social services in Minnesota. "This is especially significant in some rural areas, where one plant closing can send a community into economic depression."

And even in a good economy, research shows that workers with low skills and limited education are going to have difficulty making the earnings progress necessary to get out and stay out of poverty. This problem may be compounded by the reduced emphasis in Minnesota and nationwide on education and training for welfare recipients. "In a really strong economy, when you can get anyone to work by passing them through a two-month job-orientation program, the impetus to training has been very low," says economist Rebecca Blank. "I expect when you see the economy getting rockier and people in these low-skill jobs not getting ahead, we will go back into a cycle of caring about training again."

Another formidable challenge is that as caseloads decline, the remaining families on welfare tend to have chronic problems that are substantial barriers to work. They include substance abuse, learning disabilities, and low literacy levels. Joel Kvamme of the Minnesota Department of Human Services cites the example of a mental-health problem that is not serious enough to qualify as a disability, but is still a formidable obstacle to employment. "One worries about people with agrophobia, who are subject to panic attacks, and just what kind of experience getting out of the home and getting into the workplace represents for them," says Kvamme.

> THE MFIP PROGRAM HAS HAD PARTICULAR SUCCESS IN BOOSTING THE EMPLOYMENT AND EARNINGS OF LONG-TERM WELFARE RECIPIENTS IN URBAN AREAS.

The increasing proportion of welfare recipients with multiple problems and disadvantages, says DHS Commissioner O'Keefe, is a reality that is "on a collision course" with policy. Legislators in Minnesota and other states, he says, will eventually have to answer the question: "How do you keep people from being thrown on the street as a result of the 60-month limit, while at the same time keeping a strong incentive for those who can [work] to get into the labor force?"

For David Ellwood, a labor economist at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government and a former assistant secretary of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, MFIP and other financial-incentive programs are part of a "good news, bad news" story in U.S. public-assistance policy. "The good news is that we're clearly replacing [welfare] with a strategy of doing more for working folks," says Ellwood. "The bad news is that we have yet to figure out what we're going to do for people who aren't working, who don't qualify for disability assistance. And I think that's a real challenge, and I think that becomes a huge challenge during a recession."

Credible, Thorough Information

And what about the issue that triggered the remarkable 1986 welfare deliberations in Minnesota — the possibility that a relatively generous approach to public assistance would make Minnesota a "welfare magnet" for low-income people. To prevent that, Minnesota's statewide MFIP program initially imposed strict residency requirements on receiving public-assistance benefits. In May 1999, however, the U.S. Supreme Court found that a similar rule in California was unconstitutional. This decision, combined with an absence of any data suggesting that poor people migrated to Minnesota because of its welfare benefits, convinced the state to abandon its residency requirements for public assistance.

Over the long term, it remains an open question whether differences in state benefits might have an impact on welfare caseloads. Should that issue re-emerge, the history of welfare reform in Minnesota suggests that policymakers, researchers, advocates, and citizens of the state will take a hard look at the facts and develop a pragmatic consensus based on the evidence. "Good decisions really are possible," says Joel Kvamme, "but they rely on credible and thorough information. That's been part of our experience so far."

Bill Rust is the editor of ADVOCASEY.

NEW HOPE FOR LOW-INCOME WORKERS

When evaluating programs that "make work pay" for low-income families, researchers and policymakers have traditionally focused on labor-force participation by adults, financial costs and benefits to taxpayers, and other economic outcomes. Less frequently studied have been the effects of such programs on poor children — a somewhat ironic omission because they are the one constituency in policy debates about poverty virtually all Americans want to assist.

One of the few antipoverty programs to have a rigorous evaluation of its impact on children is New Hope, a recently concluded demonstration project in Milwaukee that offered a flexible package of earnings supplements and services to help low-income families succeed in the world of work. An evaluation of New Hope, released in April by the Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation (MDRC), not only found encouraging increases in employment and earnings among program participants, but also showed significant effects on the children — specifically boys — of participating families.

"New Hope produced substantial positive impacts on the behavior and classroom skills of boys, which held up across different age groups and were consistent across different measures," wrote the authors of MDRC's *New Hope for People With Low Incomes: Two-Year Results of a Program to Reduce Poverty and Reform Welfare*. "This is encouraging, because academic failure and problem behavior are predictors of later school failure, dropping out, and delinquency. These risks are high for boys in low-income families and promising policy alternatives to improve child outcomes are scarce."

According to Julie Kerksick, executive director of the New Hope Project, the community-based organization that operated the program, the combination of promising economic and family outcomes "validates what New Hope's originators believed: Low-income people appreciate and benefit from a modest amount of assistance when they are working."

New Hope was conceived in the late 1980s and early 1990s, when a small group of community activists and employment-services workers in Milwaukee designed a program to address many of the realities of life in the low-wage economy — below-poverty incomes, a lack of affordable health insurance, limited child-care options, and few opportunities for low-skill workers to gain job experience. To learn whether a package of economic and other supports could improve the lives of low-income workers and families, the New Hope Project made a straightforward offer to all poor adults living in two distressed neighborhoods: If you are willing to work full time, we will help you lift yourself out of poverty.

THE NEW HOPE PROJECT MADE A STRAIGHTFORWARD OFFER TO ALL POOR ADULTS LIVING IN TWO DISTRESSED NEIGHBORHOODS: IF YOU ARE WILLING TO WORK FULL TIME, WE WILL HELP YOU LIFT YOURSELF OUT OF POVERTY.

By Bill Rust

Seeking credible evidence of the program's effects, the New Hope Project hired MDRC to evaluate its impact. MDRC's traditional, methodologically rigorous approach to the evaluation included a lottery-like process that randomly assigned 1,360 adults to one of two groups: an experimental group that received the New Hope package of services, and a control group that received traditional county and state services. Differences in outcomes between these two statistically identical groups would be, in the words of evaluators, "the observed impacts" of the program.

New Hope became operational in late 1994, with most participants enrolling the following year. In exchange for working 30 or more hours per week, they were eligible for:

- Income supplements, that when combined with federal and state Earned Income Tax Credits, would enable people to work their way out of poverty. As participants' incomes approached 200 percent of the federal poverty level — $32,800 for a family of four in 1997 — the value of the supplements decreased sharply.

- Affordable health insurance, with copayments that reflected income and household size. Most participants who were not covered when they entered New Hope chose the health maintenance organization used by the Milwaukee County Medicaid program.

- Child-care subsidies, payable to state-licensed or county-certified providers. These subsidies, also based on income and family size, were the same level that Milwaukee County provided welfare recipients who were enrolled in work programs.

- Minimum-wage community-service jobs (CSJs). If, after an eight-week job search, participants were unable to find employment, New Hope provided subsidized CSJs that qualified participants for the project's other benefits and that helped establish a work history and increase workplace skills.

"NEW HOPE PRODUCED SUBSTANTIAL POSITIVE IMPACTS ON THE BEHAVIOR AND CLASSROOM SKILLS OF BOYS, WHICH HELD UP ACROSS DIFFERENT AGE GROUPS AND WERE CONSISTENT ACROSS DIFFERENT MEASURES."

More Than "Warm and Fuzzy Encouragement"

Because of its broad eligibility rules, New Hope served a diverse range of low-income people. Almost 30 percent of the sample were men. More than one-third of the participants were not receiving public assistance of any kind. And although virtually all participants had annual earnings of $15,000 or less, about one-third of the sample were employed full time when they entered the program.

"New Hope is designed so that participants can access only those benefits that they want or need," according to MDRC's initial evaluation of the program in 1997. "Participants who are covered by employer health insurance, for example, do not need New Hope's health insurance. Participants who had

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

been receiving AFDC are encouraged to use transitional Medicaid and child care assistance before using New Hope's benefits. About 30 percent of the sample lived in a household without children and therefore had no need for child care."

New Hope participants who worked full time were immediately eligible for earnings supplements as well as health-insurance and child-care subsidies, if needed. The majority of participants, however, worked either part time or not at all when they entered the program. Before they could qualify for the program's package of benefits, they had to find a full-time job. If they could not find private employment within two months, New Hope provided a community-service job in a local nonprofit agency. Although the CSJs — about two-thirds of which were either office support and data entry, or construction and property maintenance — were subsidized by New Hope, program participants had to interview for jobs, be selected by employers, and meet the same standards as other workers.

A critical ingredient in New Hope's success was the contribution of the project's front-line staff members, called "project reps," many of whom had firsthand experience with life in the low-wage economy. Providing employment services with respect and empathy, the project reps explained the sometimes complicated options of the program and served as "coaches" for people seeking employment. According to MDRC, program participants "consistently rated the support received from project reps as 'what they liked best' about New Hope."

Julie Kerksick emphasizes that it takes more than "warm and fuzzy encouragement" to get New Hope's positive results: "It's the combination of having economic support that really helps people, and being able to deliver that in a humane, efficient, and respectful way."

"Making Work Pay"

On May 27, 1999, Robert C. Granger, the MDRC senior vice president who directed the New Hope evaluation, testified before the U.S. House Subcommittee on Human Resources about the effects of the program. Compared with the control group, he told the subcommittee, New Hope increased the work effort and earnings of program participants who were not working full time. The project, he said, "reduced by half the number of people who were never employed during the two years of the study" — 13 percent for the control group and less than 6 percent for New Hope participants.

Over the two-year study period, program participants had 13 percent higher earnings, or $1,389, a figure that does not include the income supplement. With the earnings supplement, their incomes were $2,645 more than the control group's. For people not employed full time, Granger concluded, New Hope demonstrated that financial incentives and other supports "can increase work by making work pay and offering opportunities where they are needed."

Another measure of New Hope's economic benefits was an increase of 7 percentage points — 52 percent for the program group, 45 percent for controls — in the number of participants with two-year earnings in the $10,000 to $30,000 range. Robinson Hollister, a professor of economics at Swarthmore College and member of the project's advisory board, finds this notable: "When we recall how long it took this lengthy economic expansion to generate any reductions in the national rate of poverty, this project-induced shift in the earnings distribution looks impressive."

New Hope participants who were employed full time when they enrolled in the program had "modest reductions" in total work hours, "mostly by cutting back on overtime and second jobs," according to Granger's congressional testimony. Characterizing this effect as one that "can be minimized, but is likely to occur" in any financial-incentive program for the working poor, Granger testified: "New Hope improved parent-child relations in the families in this group, possibly because these families were better able to balance work and family life."

All in the Family

By making health insurance and child care affordable, New Hope helped reduce material hardship and parental stress. In the two-year follow-up, New Hope participants had fewer "unmet medical needs," particularly among the participants who were not working full time when they enrolled in the program. Moreover, the child-care assistance helped parents send their preschool and school-age children to center-based and other forms of quality child care.

"People who were getting the child-care subsidies were having less out-of-pocket costs," says Aletha C. Huston, a developmental psychologist at the University of Texas who led the evaluation of family behavior and child outcomes. "They were also getting more expensive child care."

A CRITICAL INGREDIENT IN NEW HOPE'S SUCCESS WAS THE CONTRIBUTION OF THE PROJECT'S FRONT-LINE STAFF MEMBERS, CALLED "PROJECT REPS," MANY OF WHOM HAD FIRSTHAND EXPERIENCE WITH LIFE IN THE LOW-WAGE ECONOMY.

New Hope parents were more likely than the control group to enroll preadolescent children in structured out-of-school activities — for example, lessons, organized sports, and youth groups. Researchers speculate that quality child care and after-school programs contributed to New Hope's dramatic impact on boys. A survey of teachers, who were unaware of the program being evaluated or which children were in experimental- or control-group families, found that "boys whose parents were in New Hope had better academic performance, stronger study skills, higher levels of social competence, and fewer behavior problems than control group boys."

When children themselves were surveyed about their educational and occupational aspirations, the boys in New Hope families "expected to attend and finish college in greater numbers and were more likely to aspire to professional and managerial occupations with high social prestige than boys in the control group," according to MDRC.

New Hope produced no comparable effects for girls. Researchers are unsure why, but they suspect that a number of factors may be at work. One hypothesis is that girls started with higher scores in educational measures and had less room for improvement. Another possibility is that inner-city parents, worried about their sons getting into trouble, particularly boys 9 to 12, may have focused additional attention and resources on them. "The parents express the feeling that this is the time they have to hang on to their boys," says Aletha Huston. "Their boys are in danger of getting into gangs and getting into pathways that will make it really difficult for parents to keep any control."

In MDRC's five-year evaluation of New Hope, scheduled for release in 2002, researchers will determine whether the large impacts for boys hold up and which components of the program might be responsible for them. "It's difficult to pin it down because the program is a package," says Huston. "We are going to reinterview the families and the children next year."

"Cumulative Impacts"

Notwithstanding its well-documented economic and family outcomes, New Hope is not the proverbial "silver bullet" for poverty in America's inner cities. In assessing the strengths and limitations of the program, Robert Granger told Congress: "Most of those who applied to New Hope remain poor two years later and reliant on some public subsidy to make ends meet." The primary reason the majority remained poor, he said, was because "they did not consistently work full time (and could receive New Hope benefits only when they did)."

A related concern of some policymakers is that much of New Hope's work and earnings increases may have been the result of subsidized community-service jobs. What about the harder task of finding private-sector jobs? One reply, says Robert Granger, is that most of the New Hope participants who used community-service jobs "found regular unsubsidized employment afterwards." Julie Kerksick of the New Hope Project also makes no apologies for the CSJs: "They were designed to help people who might have spotty work histories or just have had a hard time putting together a consistent work record."

Some researchers, who acknowledge that New Hope increased employment and earnings and reduced poverty, note that these gains were not as large as those of the Canadian Self-Sufficiency Project (see page 17) or the Minnesota Family Investment Program (see page 4). MDRC evaluators are not sure why this is the case, but they suspect that Milwaukee's "control environment" is a large part of the answer.

Robert Granger explains the methodological issue this way: Random-assignment experiments like New Hope measure the relative difference of outcomes for the control group and the experimental group. The combination of a surging Milwaukee economy, expanding federal and state Earned Income Tax Credits, and a restructuring of the state's welfare system "sets a high hurdle to beat," he says. "I think New Hope's effects might have been more substantial with a less favorable labor market or less state attention to encouraging work."

According to MDRC's two-year evaluation, it is still too soon to make a final cost-benefit analysis of New Hope. Although the financial costs are known — $7,200 over two years per participant (with the majority of funds spent on health-care and child-care subsidies, rather than earnings supplements or community-service jobs) — the long-term economic and social benefits are unknown. Moreover, write evaluators, "the New Hope vision is not easily summarized in any traditional cost-benefit framework, since many of its key goals and achievements cannot be captured in dollar terms."

Perhaps reflecting the differing perspectives of evaluators and program operators, Julie Kerksick easily summarizes the achievements of the project, though not in strictly economic terms. "New Hope helped people make progress in a way that the control group didn't," she says. "It's the number of things you see working in the right direction and the cumulative impacts that are the ultimate judgment of the program for me. They don't show up necessarily as economic impacts, but I think most policymakers would say those are good impacts."

The executive summary of New Hope for People With Low Incomes: Two-Year Results of a Program to Reduce Poverty and Reform Welfare *is available online at www.mdrc.org. In addition to the Annie E. Casey Foundation, funders of this evaluation were: the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, the Helen Bader Foundation, the Ford Foundation, the State of Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development, the W. T. Grant Foundation, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, and the National Institute of Child Health and Development.*

CANADIAN DOUBLES EMPLOYMENT, INCOME, AND OTHER IMPACTS OF THE SELF-SUFFICIENCY PROJECT

By Bill Rust

The economic, political, and international-security interests shared by Canada and the United States were aptly summarized by President John F. Kennedy almost four decades ago: "Geography has made us neighbors. History has made us friends. Economics has made us partners. And necessity has made us allies. Those whom nature hath so joined, let no man put asunder."

Today the two countries' marriage of interests and values includes a common concern about the financial and social costs of their respective welfare systems. Like Americans, Canadians do not want large numbers of children living in poverty. Yet, also like most Americans, they are increasingly worried that cash assistance to low-income families discourages work and encourages dependence.

The Canadian cash-assistance program, called "Income Assistance," has many of the same structural flaws as the old American AFDC system. For single parents with limited skills and education, leaving welfare is not necessarily a good choice because entry-level wages are too low to improve the material well-being of their families. After child-care and other job-related expenses, recipients are likely to be financially worse off than if they remain on public assistance.

To test the effectiveness of financial incentives aimed at both encouraging work and reducing family poverty, the Canadian government established the Self-Sufficiency Project (SSP) in 1992. Operating in the provinces of British Columbia and New Brunswick, SSP is a 10-year demonstration-evaluation initiative involving some 9,000 Income Assistance recipients. The project's main study has been examining the impact of a temporary cash earnings supplement for long-term recipients who voluntarily leave welfare to work full time. A second study seeks to determine whether new welfare applicants would stay on welfare longer to qualify for the earnings supplement, and the effects of such a supplement on qualifying applicants' subsequent employment, earnings, income, and welfare receipt. A third is measuring the effects of financial incentives on long-term welfare recipients who also receive assistance in finding a job.

THE SELF-SUFFICIENCY PROJECT HAS ACHIEVED SOME OF THE LARGEST AND MOST CONSISTENT GAINS IN EMPLOYMENT, EARNINGS, AND INCOME OF ANY WELFARE-TO-WORK PROGRAM.

To date, the Self-Sufficiency Project has achieved some of the largest and most consistent gains in employment, earnings, and income of any welfare-to-work program. Moreover, a new report suggests that SSP could pay for itself through reductions in welfare caseloads and increases in tax revenue from earnings. "Incentives work," says John Greenwood, executive director of the Social Research and Demonstration Corporation (SRDC), which designed and managed the project. "You can actually help people move toward self-sufficiency through employment and help them out of poverty. If we can save the government money, we could have a triple winner here."

Leaving Welfare

All of the participants in the main SSP study were on Income Assistance for at least one year. Seventy-two percent were receiving welfare for two or more years, and nearly one-half for three or more years. As in the United States, long-term welfare recipients in Canada account for a disproportionately large share of public-assistance expenditures.

Instead of operating within the welfare system, the Self-Sufficiency Project was conducted by SRDC, a new nonprofit organization created by the Canadian government. Assisted by and patterned after the Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation (MDRC), SRDC adopted the U.S. organization's rigorous random-assignment approach to designing and evaluating social programs. The establishment of SRDC was a conscious effort by the Canadian government "to raise the standards of evidence used in judging program effectiveness," says Greenwood, a former official of Employment and Immigration Canada (now called Human Resources Development Canada).

Researchers have concluded that operating SSP out of an employment-focused organization — rather than a welfare agency — was a significant factor. "People physically left welfare and were admitted to another program that was designed to support them when they work," says MDRC's Gordon Berlin, who founded SRDC and was its first executive director. "Because the program was built around work, we expected it to have less stigma than welfare."

In the main SSP study, long-term welfare recipients were randomly assigned either to an experimental group that was offered an earnings supplement for leaving welfare within one year, or to a comparison group that received traditional Income Assistance benefits. Participants in the SSP group who accepted this offer and worked 30 or more hours per week received a substantial income supplement for up to three years — as long they worked full time and remained off of public assistance. This supplement effectively doubled the income of people who earned between $9,000 and $11,000 per year.[1]

The financial incentive to work was reinforced by a strong "marketing" effort. Within a month of assignment to the SSP group, participants spent three hours with trained staff who explained the program and its main features. "The central message conveyed was that the supplement could 'make work pay,' even if a minimum-wage job was all that could be found," wrote the authors of the SRDC/MDRC evaluation *When Financial Incentives Encourage Work: Complete 18-Month Findings From the Self-Sufficiency Project.*

The outcomes in the 18-month follow-up study were striking. Thirty-five percent of the SSP group voluntarily left Income Assistance and went to work. Most of the people who were induced to work by SSP took low-wage jobs, and much of their earnings supplement was spent on three basic necessities: food, housing, and children's clothing. Participants were also "able to reduce their dependence on food banks and begin accumulating some assets," according to the evaluation.

---

[1] One Canadian dollar is equal to about 70 cents U.S.

When compared with the control group, specific impacts for SSP participants included:

- a doubling of the full-time employment rate;
- a reduction of nearly 14 percentage points in welfare receipt; and
- a decrease of 12 percentage points in incomes below the poverty level.

In the short run, the SSP supplement for long-term welfare recipients increased public costs. The *net* cost of the program was about $55 more per month for each participant. Contrasting SSP's incentives to work with the disincentives of traditional welfare, Gordon Berlin suggests that some provinces — or states — might consider an additional $55 per month something of a bargain. "SSP is not paying people to stay home and not work," he says. "It's supporting a working culture, and it's doing it in a way that lifts children out of poverty. By helping recipients purchase basic necessities and build assets, an additional $600 per year might be a good investment."

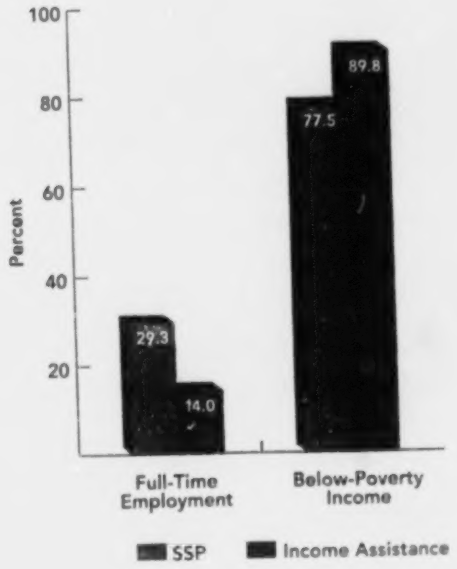
"When Financial Incentives Pay for Themselves"

But what about the long-term benefits and costs of SSP? Researchers say it is too soon to tell whether SSP participants will be able to use their work experience to generate higher earnings and to become economically self-sufficient when the earnings supplement ends. If significant numbers could, all of the costs of SSP would be offset by reductions in welfare payments and increases in tax revenue.

BY THE NUMBERS: INCREASING EMPLOYMENT, REDUCING POVERTY

Compared with a control group of long-term recipients of Income Assistance, Canada's cash-benefit program for poor individuals and families, an experimental group of long-term recipients randomly assigned to the main study of the Self-Sufficiency Project (SSP) had higher rates of full-time employment and lower rates of family poverty.

Source: Social Research and Demonstration Corporation



That such a long-term outcome is a realistic possibility was confirmed by a new SRDC/MDRC study released in August 1999. "SSP considerably increased the average income of program group members, *with no increase in transfer program costs* [emphasis in original]," wrote the authors of ***When Financial Incentives Pay for Themselves: Early Findings from the Self-Sufficiency Project's Applicant Study.***

The primary purpose of the SSP applicant study was to determine whether new welfare recipients would remain on public assistance longer to qualify for the earnings supplement. The answer, researchers found, was that few did, largely because of the stigma associated with welfare. SRDC's John Greenwood recalls one woman who left welfare for a job after 11 months of receiving Income Assistance: "When we said to her, 'You only had to wait another month, then you could have qualified for SSP if you then went to work.' She said, 'I wouldn't spend an extra day on welfare longer than I had to, let alone a month. And secondly, this is the only job offer I got in 11 months, and I don't know if it would still be here a month from now.' "

SSP PUBLICATIONS

When Financial Incentives Encourage Work, When Financial Incentives Pay for Themselves, and Does SSP Plus Increase Employment? are available from the Social Research and Demonstration Corporation, 250 Albert Street, Suite 625, Ottawa, Ontario K1P 6M1, Canada, Tel.: (613) 237-4311, www.srdc.org. They are also available from the Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation, 16 East 34 Street, New York, NY 10016, Tel.: (212) 532-3200, www.mdrc.org.

In 2000, SRDC will release a report on the program's economic impacts 36 months after participants entered the program. This study will also include research on the effects of SSP on children in participating families. A 54-month follow-up is scheduled for release in 2002.

The second purpose of the SSP applicant study was to measure employment, earnings, and other impacts of SSP on new welfare recipients who stayed on Income Assistance for a year and qualified for the earnings supplement. As with the SSP main study, the SSP offer to qualifying applicants prompted increases in earnings and reductions in poverty that "are among the largest ever seen in a social experiment designed to encourage welfare recipients to work," according to the evaluation.

Compared with the control group, which received Income Assistance benefits, outcomes for qualifying participants in the applicant study included:

- an increase of 12 percentage points in full-time employment;
- an increase in monthly earnings of $223; and
- a reduction of 11 percentage points in the proportion of families in poverty.

The reason the SSP applicant program paid for itself is that the participants — who because of recent employment tended to be more job ready than the long-term recipients — were able to secure higher-paying jobs. "The more they earn," says SRDC's Greenwood, "the less we pay, so the supplements are cheaper. Plus the tax take for the government more than offsets the costs of the smaller supplements with this group. This is attracting a lot of attention among the provincial governments in Canada that are responsible for paying Income Assistance."

SSP Plus

The third study, involving some 900 long-term welfare recipients in the lower third of New Brunswick, seeks primarily to measure the incremental impacts of adding employment services to SSP's financial incentives. The employment services provided by SRDC included individual employment plans, assistance in producing résumés, job coaching to resolve problems once on the job, and help finding a better job when appropriate. "SSP Plus tested a combination of pre- and post-employment services designed to reach 'deeper' into the eligible caseload to help people who could not find jobs on their own do so," says Gordon Berlin. "Once they found jobs, the goal was to help people to hold on to them."

> A NEW REPORT SUGGESTS THAT SSP COULD PAY FOR ITSELF THROUGH REDUCTIONS IN WELFARE CASELOADS AND INCREASES IN TAX REVENUE FROM EARNINGS.

Adding employment services "significantly increased the share of single-parent IA recipients who took advantage of the SSP offer," wrote the authors of *Does SSP Plus Increase Employment? The Effect of Adding Services to the Self-Sufficiency Project's Financial Incentives,* also released in August 1999 by SRDC. The proportion of long-term recipients who accepted the offer of receiving an earnings supplement in exchange for leaving welfare was 52 percent in SSP Plus, compared with 35 percent in the regular SSP program.

Although adding employment services increased the proportion of long-term recipients who left welfare for work, this did not translate into significant long-term employment gains above and beyond the group receiving financial incentives only. The problem was that the part of the caseload that used employment services to take up the SSP offer had difficulty maintaining full-time employment. "These people were less job ready," says John Greenwood. "They were not able to hold on to jobs, they were less able to cope with job loss, and when it occurred, become re-employed."

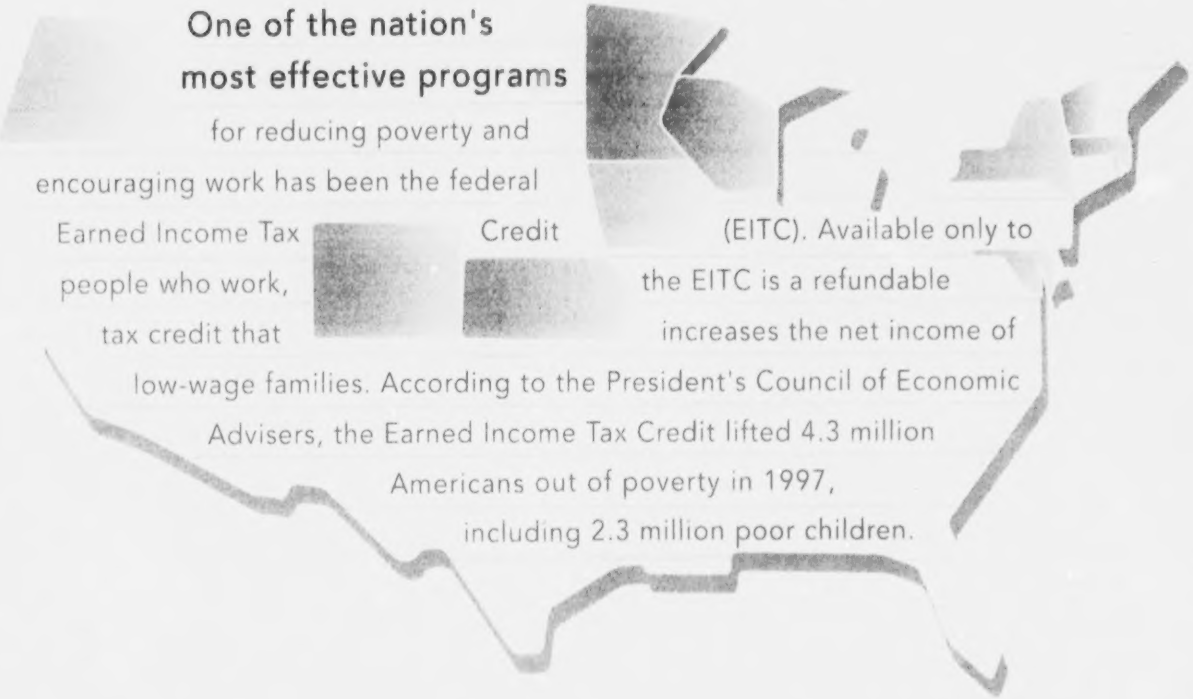
For SRDC/MDRC researchers, the sobering rate of job loss in SSP Plus has confirmed a durable lesson of many welfare-reform initiatives — leaving welfare for work is often a process, not a single event. "[H]elping people leave welfare for work is only the first step," wrote the evaluators. "An important part of the policy challenge is to find effective ways of helping people retain employment."

Although it did not produce significant employment and earnings gains above and beyond the financial incentives alone, SSP Plus posted large increases in employment, earnings, and income when compared with the control group that received Income Assistance. For example, 15 months after entering the program, 33 percent of the SSP Plus group were employed full time, while only 15.6 percent of the control group were employed full time.

"Overall, SSP Plus was a great success," says Gordon Berlin. "It got many more people working full time than SSP alone. And even though the rate of job loss was high for the extra people who were working, SSP Plus always had larger impacts than the regular SSP."

TAX RELIEF FOR WORKING

By Bill Rust



One of the nation's most effective programs for reducing poverty and encouraging work has been the federal Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC). Available only to people who work, the EITC is a refundable tax credit that increases the net income of low-wage families. According to the President's Council of Economic Advisers, the Earned Income Tax Credit lifted 4.3 million Americans out of poverty in 1997, including 2.3 million poor children.

In recent years, several states have adopted or expanded their own versions of the EITC. Of the 41 states (plus the District of Columbia) that have income taxes, 11 now have state EITCs.[1] In Iowa, Oregon, and Rhode Island, the tax credits are non-refundable — i.e., the maximum benefit cannot exceed the family's tax liability. A more effective approach to alleviating poverty and encouraging work is a refundable tax credit, which eight states have adopted.

"Taxes really are very significant in their impact on low-income families," says Nicholas Johnson, a policy analyst at the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. "The EITC is a tax cut for low-income families, not a welfare payment to the poor."

Encouraging Work

Established in 1975, the federal EITC was designed to offset the impact of federal payroll taxes for Social Security and Medicare. Unlike the federal income tax, which has higher rates for higher income groups, the payroll taxes take a larger percentage of income from poor people. Over the years, liberals and conservatives have found the rationale for the EITC persuasive: Taxing low-income working families into poverty, or further into poverty, is not wise public policy.

---

[1] Colorado, Iowa, Kansas, Maryland, Massachusetts, Minnesota, New York, Oregon, Rhode Island, Wisconsin, and Vermont.

The federal EITC was expanded during the Reagan, Bush, and Clinton administrations, helping "make work pay" for low-income families. The maximum EITC benefit for a family with one child is currently $2,312; for a family with two or more children, the maximum is $3,816.[2] If the credit exceeds the federal income tax owed, a qualifying family receives a refund check. If there is no tax liability, the family receives the entire amount of the credit.

Complementing welfare reform, the EITC provides low-income single parents with a powerful incentive to work. As the credit phases in, its value for very low-income workers increases with work effort and earnings. Bruce Meyer and Dan T. Rosenbaum, economists at Northwestern University, have calculated that the EITC accounts for about 60 percent of the increase in annual employment of single mothers between 1984 and 1996.

"My evidence suggests that financial incentives, whether they come from welfare or the tax system, have similar effects on people," says Meyer. "If you increase the return on work for a welfare recipient by adding an Earned Income Tax Credit or lowering income disregards, there is a similar effect in encouraging single mothers to work."

Tax Relief

Even with the federal EITC, many families are unable to work their way out of poverty. One barrier to financial self-sufficiency is the impact of state and local taxes. Poor and near-poor working families pay a substantial portion of their income in sales, excise, and other taxes. "State and local taxes are very regressive," says Elizabeth McNichol, director of the State Fiscal Project at the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. "They place a heavier burden on low-income people than on high-income people. We're getting to the point where state policymakers are recognizing that they need to look at issues of the working poor and that they need to look at tax relief for low-income families."

LIBERALS AND CONSERVATIVES HAVE FOUND THE RATIONALE FOR THE EARNED INCOME TAX CREDIT PERSUASIVE: TAXING LOW-INCOME WORKING FAMILIES INTO POVERTY, OR FURTHER INTO POVERTY, IS NOT WISE PUBLIC POLICY.

Although the federal government does not tax the income of poor families,[3] almost half the states tax the earnings of families with incomes below the poverty level. In Kentucky, where two-thirds of poor families with children work, the state's 1998 threshold for taxing family income was $5,000. "A two parent family of four with poverty level income paid $550 in Kentucky income taxes, the highest burden in the

---

[2] A small EITC is available to low-income families and individuals without children. The maximum benefit is $347, and this population is responsible for about 3 percent of EITC expenditures.

[3] For a two-parent family of four, the federal government's threshold for taxable income is $18,300 per year.

C

DOCUMENTING PROGRAMS THAT WORK FOR KIDS AND FAMILIES

A PUBLICATION OF THE ANNIE E. CASEY FOUNDATION | SPRING 1999 | VOLUME ONE | NUMBER ONE

PROMISES TO KEEP AUTONOMY AND ACCOUNTABILITY IN MASSACHUSETTS CHARTER SCHOOLS

ORGANIZING FOR EDUCATION THE ALLIANCE SCHOOLS IN TEXAS

PUNISH 'EM, FIX 'EM, MAKE 'EM GO AWAY MULTISYSTEMIC THERAPY HAS A BETTER IDEA

DECAT IN THE HAT IOWA'S SUCCESSFUL FIRST STEP TOWARD DEVOLVING RESOURCES, RESPONSIBILITY, AND ACCOUNTABILITY FOR CHILD AND FAMILY OUTCOMES

A TALE OF TWO CITIES THE JOBS INITIATIVE IN MILWAUKEE AND ST. LOUIS

country," according to *Poverty Despite Work in Kentucky*, a report by the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities and Kentucky Youth Advocates.

Illinois, another state with a very low threshold for taxing the income of working families, recently doubled its personal exemption from $1,000 to $2,000. Despite this encouraging step toward tax equity, the state begins taxing family income when it reaches 49 percent of the poverty level. Brian Matakis, a project director at Voices for Illinois Children, sees an inconsistency between the state's income tax for low-wage families with children and its other policies to encourage work and reduce dependency.

"In Illinois, we have done a laudable job crafting children's health insurance, child-care subsidies, and other work-first, employment-centered supports," says Matakis. "And then we have an income tax that not only doesn't complement these investments, but actually works against them by taxing families deeper into poverty."

A ***nonrefundable*** state EITC can provide tax relief to working families with incomes near poverty level. But to assist working families with incomes below the poverty line, who owe little or no income tax, a ***refundable*** EITC is necessary.

In addition to reinforcing the federal tax credit and reducing the adverse impact of state and local taxes, a state EITC has at least one other benefit. It is simple for states to administer and low-income families to claim. Using federal eligibility rules, refundable state EITCs are based on a simple percentage of the federal credit.[4] Depending on the state, this proportion ranges from 8.5 percent to 25 percent of the federal EITC.[5]

COMPLEMENTING WELFARE REFORM, THE EITC PROVIDES LOW-INCOME SINGLE PARENTS WITH A POWERFUL INCENTIVE TO WORK. AS THE CREDIT PHASES IN, ITS VALUE FOR VERY LOW-INCOME WORKERS INCREASES WITH WORK EFFORT AND EARNINGS.

Costs and Benefits

Because state EITCs assist low-income families and advance welfare-reform goals, one might reasonably ask why there aren't such credits in every state with an income tax. Part of the answer involves the traditionally slow pace of policy change, and the inevitable competition among budget priorities. Moreover, tax policy is a complicated and often intimidating topic for legislators and advocates alike. "It's been challenging for us as an organization to ratchet up our understanding the issues," says Debra Miller, executive director of Kentucky Youth Advocates. "It's also very challenging for us to get other child advocates interested in this."

---

[4] Minnesota, which recently expanded its state EITC for families by about two-thirds, has a slightly different and somewhat more complex benefit structure than the federal government or other states.

[5] In Wisconsin, the percentage of the federal EITC varies with the number of children: one child, 4 percent; two children, 14 percent; and three children, 43 percent.

STATE BUDGET AND TAX ANALYSIS

TODAY STATES ARE "IN THEIR BEST FINANCIAL CONDITIONS IN DECADES," according to a recent survey of 44 states by the National Conference of State Legislatures. Because of a healthy national economy, conservative revenue forecasts, and other factors, the reporting states have an aggregate ending balance of $33.4 billion for fiscal year 1999. Among the questions raised by budget surpluses: Should states save money in rainy-day funds and other reserves? spend on education, infrastructure, and other programs? or cut income, sales, and other taxes?

As policymakers wrestle with these questions, a growing number of state-level organizations concerned with the well-being of disadvantaged children are providing sophisticated research and analysis to inform public debates about tax, revenue, and budget priorities. Since 1993 the Annie E. Casey Foundation has provided support to the State Fiscal Analysis Initiative (SFAI), a network of 22 state-based organizations engaged in research and public education. Funding for SFAI is also provided by the Ford Foundation, Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, Open Society Institute, and several local and regional philanthropies. Promoting equitable tax and budgetary policies that meet the needs of all citizens, the state-based organizations receive technical assistance from the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, a Washington, D.C.-based organization that conducts national and state-level research on fiscal policy.

For additional information on the State Fiscal Analysis Initiative, contact: Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 820 First Street, NE, Suite 510, Washington, DC 20002, phone: 202-408-1080, www.cbpp.org. For a copy of the new publication *The State Fiscal Analysis Initiative: Building Organizational Capacity for State Budget and Tax Analysis*, contact: Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, 1200 Mott Foundation Building, Flint, MI 48502-1851, Publications Hot Line: 800-645-1766, www.mott.org.

Eight of the Annie E. Casey Foundation's KIDS COUNT state grantees, which receive support to collect, analyze, and disseminate information on the well-being of children, are participating in SFAI.

Arizona
Children's Action Alliance
4001 N. 3rd Street, Suite 160
Phoenix, AZ 85012
Phone: 602-266-0707
www.azchildren.org

Illinois
Voices for Illinois Children
208 South LaSalle, Suite 1490
Chicago, IL 60604
Phone: 312-456-0600
www.voices4kids.org

Kentucky
Kentucky Youth Advocates
2034 Frankfort Avenue
Louisville, KY 40206
Phone: 502-875-4865
www.kyyouth.org

New Jersey
Association for Children of New Jersey
35 Halsey Street
Newark, NJ 07102
Phone: 973-643-3876
www.acnj.org

Pennsylvania
Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children
20 N. Market Square, Suite 300
Harrisburg, PA 17101-1632
Phone: 717-236-5680
www.papartnerships.org

Texas
Center for Public Policy Priorities
900 Lydia Street
Austin, TX 78702
Phone: 512-320-0222
www.cppp.org

Washington
University of Washington
Institute of Public Policy and
Management
Fiscal Policy Center
Box 353060
Seattle, WA 98195-3060
Phone: 206-543-0190
weber.u.washington.edu/~fpcweb

Wisconsin
Wisconsin Council on Children
and Families
16 N. Carroll Street, Suite 600
Madison, WI 53703
Phone: 608-284-0580
www.wccf.org

A NONREFUNDABLE STATE EITC CAN PROVIDE TAX RELIEF TO WORKING FAMILIES WITH INCOMES NEAR THE POVERTY LEVEL. BUT TO ASSIST WORKING FAMILIES WITH INCOMES WELL BELOW THE POVERTY LINE, A REFUNDABLE EITC IS NECESSARY.

Perhaps the largest hurdle to more states enacting Earned Income Tax Credits is the discomforting fact that low-income people supply many state treasuries with substantial income-tax revenue. According to an analysis by Voices for Illinois Children, a new state EITC that was 10 percent of the federal tax credit would cost more than $100 million per year. "The reality is that the state of Illinois gets millions of dollars each year from poor folks," says Brian Matakis. "And if you have an Earned Income Tax Credit, we are going to lose those revenues."

One way that many states could partially finance an EITC is by taking advantage of the flexibility built into the 1996 federal welfare-reform law. The final regulations for Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), issued in April by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, allow states to use either federal or state welfare dollars to pay for the refundable portion of a state Earned Income Tax Credit. This option should appeal to some state legislators as declining welfare caseloads create significant TANF surpluses.

Acknowledging that a state Earned Income Tax Credit is expensive, researchers and advocates explain that this is only natural because large numbers of people can benefit from it. In 1998 some 20 million poor and near-poor workers nationwide claimed the federal EITC. "People who aren't reached by most programs for low-income people benefit from these tax credits," says Nicholas Johnson. "A lot of state legislators need to come to grips with the fact that a lot of their constituents could benefit from these credits."

For many, the ultimate justification for a state Earned Income Tax Credit is its value as a long-term investment in children. Study after study has shown the links between poverty and poor developmental, educational, and adult outcomes. And growing numbers of policymakers, researchers, and advocates believe such an investment in working families will benefit children and society as a whole. "An Earned Income Tax Credit is certainly not as direct a benefit to children as quality child care," says Brian Matakis. "But at its most basic level, the EITC gets to the heart of something that's been a hardship for a long time, and that's an absence of family resources. If you can't support a nurturing environment and add to it, then you're really not going to be able to improve children's lives."

ASSESSING WELFARE REFORM

RECENT REPORTS FROM THE URBAN INSTITUTE

By Michael deCourcy Hinds

The 1990s have unquestionably been a decade of profound change in domestic social policy. Responsibility for the social safety net has been shifting from the federal government to the states, and welfare as we had known it for 60 years officially ended in 1996. What remains unanswered is the impact of these changes on low-income families and children. How would millions of young mothers with little education or work experience pull their families through poverty? How would states cope with their new responsibilities? How would employers respond?

On Jan. 30, 1997, the Urban Institute formally announced the establishment of an ambitious research project called "Assessing the New Federalism." The institute, a nonpartisan policy research organization in Washington, D.C., is collaborating on the project with Child Trends, a nonprofit research organization also in Washington. The focus of the project is primarily on health care, income security, job training, and social services.

Assessing the New Federalism was developed at the request of the Annie E. Casey Foundation, with the aim of providing policymakers and others with information about significant developments affecting children and families. The Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation, W. K. Kellogg Foundation, and John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation have joined Casey to provide significant support for the project.

At this stage, researchers are still collecting information, not reaching conclusions. This article presents a glimpse of the work in progress, based on a half-dozen recent studies on aspects of welfare reform.

Moving from AFDC to TANF

The institute's December 1998 report, entitled *Cash Assistance in Transition: The Story of 13 States*, serves as an excellent primer for understanding the landmark shift in welfare policy. The report, written by researchers Sheila R. Zedlewski, Pamela A. Holcomb, and Amy-Ellen Duke, provides the national context for welfare reform and describes policy shifts in 13 representative states, where over half of welfare recipients live.

> THE URBAN INSTITUTE REPORT *CASH ASSISTANCE IN TRANSITION* PROVIDES THE NATIONAL CONTEXT FOR WELFARE REFORM AND DESCRIBES POLICY SHIFTS IN 13 REPRESENTATIVE STATES, WHERE OVER HALF OF WELFARE RECIPIENTS LIVE.

As the authors note, the most prominent welfare program, Aid to Families With Dependent Children (AFDC), had been widely criticized as ineffective. Among other things, it was believed to foster dependence, as eligible families could receive cash assistance as long as they had a dependent child under age 18. AFDC also discouraged marriage by treating two-parent families far less favorably than single parents. And while AFDC emphasized education and training, it was largely ineffective in moving people into the work force.

To refocus public assistance, Congress passed and the President signed the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996. The act created AFDC's successor program, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). The act's stated goals were to: "(1) provide assistance to needy families so that children may be cared for in their own homes or relatives'; (2) end the dependence of needy parents on government benefits by promoting job preparation, work, and marriage; (3) prevent and reduce the incidence of out-of-wedlock pregnancies; (4) encourage the formation and maintenance of two-parent families."

To reach these goals, the federal government mandated rules about eligibility, work, and time limits for public assistance, as outlined:

- *Work:* States must have 50 percent of all families in work or work-prescribed activities by 2002, with intermediate work requirements starting in 1997.

- *Participation:* Parents must participate in work-related activities unless they have a child under one year old.

- *Benefit Time Limits:* Cash assistance is available for no more than five years in a recipient family's lifetime. (States have latitude in setting shorter time limits or in extending benefits past five years using state funds only. States may also exempt 20 percent of their caseload.)

- *Spending:* The use of federal block grants, nominally fixed until 2002, gives states considerable leeway in providing support to low-income, two-parent families. Federal funds can also be saved in case of an economic downturn.

- *Deterrence:* To discourage out-of-wedlock births, unwed teen mothers must live with their parents or other responsible adults and must attend high school or other equivalent training to be eligible for cash assistance.

The authors of *Cash Assistance in Transition* also describe the great variation in the way states have been crafting new systems within the federal framework. Florida, for example, has set a four-year lifetime limit for receiving TANF benefits, while Michigan has set no lifetime limit, as it plans to use state funds for family benefits after the family loses eligibility for federal funds. Generally, states are encouraging work by disregarding portions of a family's earned income in setting family benefit levels. States are also setting tougher sanctions for people who fail to comply with work rules, including the ultimate sanction in some states of eliminating the entire family benefit.

State and local welfare officials told the study's authors that their biggest concern was that families would fall through the cracks during this transitional period of policy overhaul. "Respondents were worried that the TANF time clocks for work participation and benefit termination were ticking away while these reforms were still getting under way, raising the specter that — even in a good economy — some state changes focused on service delivery might come too late for those whose clocks are ticking."

Running an Obstacle Course to Work

From March 1994, the peak of welfare caseloads, to September 1998 the nation's welfare rolls decreased by 43 percent. How are former welfare recipients doing in the labor market, and what are the prospects for those still on welfare? An Urban Institute survey, called the *National Survey of America's Families*, helps answer these questions. The nationwide survey collected economic, health and social characteristics for 44,000 households, with a special emphasis on households in 13 states where the institute is closely monitoring policy changes. The survey was conducted between February and November of 1997 as states were starting to put new welfare programs in place. A 1999 version of the survey is now under way.

First, the report from *current* welfare recipients: Many welfare recipients said they were moving toward independence, but many others report facing an obstacle course of personal and family problems, which make it hard for them to work. "Our results present a good-news, bad-news kind of story for parents receiving TANF in 1997," Sheila R. Zedlewski writes in her June 1999 report entitled, *Work-Related Activities and Limitations of Welfare Recipients.* The survey involved interviews with 1,564 adults on welfare who are likely to be affected by new work participation rules.

The good news:

- *Many are in work-related activities:* A historically high number of welfare recipients were participating in work-related activities: 21 percent held jobs, 10 percent were in school, 24 percent were actively looking for work.

- *Early experiments with work policies are paying off:* States that encouraged work activities prior to the new TANF requirements achieved significantly higher work participation rates than other states.

- *Welfare-reform targets are in sight:* In the near term, most states will have little trouble meeting the new federal work activity targets for all TANF families — targets that are linked to funding. This is because work participation rates are already high, and recent declines in caseloads also make the targets easier to reach.

The bad news:

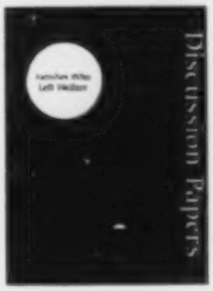
- *Most face obstacles to work:* Three in four parents on welfare report having at least one significant obstacle to work; nearly one in five parents report having three or more obstacles to work.

- *Common obstacles are serious:* 48 percent report having either poor physical health or poor mental health; 43 percent haven't worked for three or more years; 41 percent do not have a high school diploma or equivalent; 15 percent have an infant; 10 percent live outside metropolitan areas and don't have a car to drive to work; 7 percent may have limited English language skills; and 4 percent care for a disabled child.

- *Some are at risk:* Parents who face the greatest risk of remaining on welfare are the 27 percent who have two or more obstacles to work and are not engaged in any kind of work-related activity.

- *Welfare-reform targets could become harder to hit:* Over time, state caseloads will likely include higher concentrations of severely disadvantaged families, making it more difficult for states to meet federal goals, with the risk of losing funding.

Second, the report from *former* welfare recipients: How are people faring after leaving welfare? What yardstick can be used to measure their progress? Because former welfare recipients are nearly all women entering the bottom tier of the labor market, institute researchers assessed their progress by comparing them with low-income women with children who had not been on welfare. The institute's June 1999 study, entitled *Families Who Left Welfare: Who Are They and How Are They Doing?* and written by Pamela J. Loprest, also draws on the institute's 1997 national household survey.



The study compares responses of low-income mothers to responses of 1,289 former welfare recipients who left welfare between 1995 and 1997 and remained off welfare in 1997. Nationally, nearly four out of ten mothers with children under 18 in 1996 were classified as low-income, meaning that their incomes fell below 200 percent of the federal poverty level (about $26,000 for a three-person family with two dependent children).

Former welfare recipients and low-income women are similar in many ways: they have similar numbers of children, with two being the median number. Most are poorly educated (only one in three has a high school diploma or equivalent), and most are white (although former welfare recipients include a disproportionately low percentage of Hispanics and a disproportionately high percentage of African Americans).

In both groups, most women are working and have similar jobs, mainly in service and retail industries. (Almost half of non-working, former welfare recipients say they received child support payments, Social Security benefits, or Supplemental Security Income; how other unemployed women get by is unknown.)

HOW ARE FORMER WELFARE RECIPIENTS DOING IN THE LABOR MARKET, AND WHAT ARE THE PROSPECTS FOR THOSE STILL ON WELFARE? AN URBAN INSTITUTE SURVEY, CALLED THE *NATIONAL SURVEY OF AMERICA'S FAMILIES*, HELPS ANSWER THESE QUESTIONS.

Former welfare recipients tend to earn a bit more than low-income mothers: the median hourly wages were $6.61 versus $6.06. Nearly one in ten women in both groups hold two jobs. Perhaps due to their longer time in the work force, 36 percent of low-income women have employer-provided health insurance compared to 23 percent of former welfare recipients.

There are also big differences. Former welfare recipients are younger, on average, as almost one in three is under 25. They also have younger children, with one in four moms having a child under the age of one. The biggest difference of all is marital status: 61 percent of former welfare recipients are single parents without partners compared with 32 percent of low-income mothers.

Many low-income women report hardships, but many more former welfare recipients experience the same problems. For example, one in three low-income mothers sometimes or often didn't have enough food for their families, compared with one in two former welfare recipients. Similarly, 28 percent of low-income mothers had trouble with housing costs in the prior year, but 39 percent of former welfare recipients reported this problem.

Given these hardships, it is unclear why so many mothers do not receive food stamps and Medicaid benefits. Among former welfare recipients, only 31 percent receive food stamps, only 34 percent of the adults are covered by Medicaid, and only 47 percent of their children are covered by Medicaid. Former welfare recipients are eligible for food stamps, based on their income; they are generally eligible for Medicaid for one to two years after leaving welfare, depending on the state; and children under the age of 15 in low-income families are eligible for Medicaid.

Among those who leave welfare and food stamp programs, 60 percent leave both programs at the same time. Explanations range from people not understanding the eligibility rules to their sense of the hassle and stigma associated with receiving public assistance. "We seem to be observing a cultural change, a shift away from using government assistance toward making it on your own," says Sheila R. Zedlewski, director of the institute's Income and Benefits Policy Center.

The number of low-income families receiving public benefits are even lower: 13 percent receive food stamps, 12 percent of the adults are covered by Medicaid, and 24 percent of their children are covered by Medicaid. "We cannot sort out whether higher rates of use among former welfare recipients reflect greater need than other low-income families or merely less stigma or greater knowledge of benefit programs," writes Loprest, a senior research associate at the institute, in *Families Who Left Welfare*.

All in all, most former welfare recipients are fitting into the low-income labor market. "The fact that 75 percent of former welfare recipients are working themselves or have a spouse or partner who is working is positive," Loprest says. "Also that welfare recipients who work are doing as well as other non-recipient moms is telling."

But some are not doing so well. During the study period, 29 percent of those who left welfare returned. In noting that single parents face the most difficulties, Loprest writes, "This suggests that policies to encourage and support work might benefit from focusing on how to support single-parent families generally rather than necessarily targeting former welfare recipients."

There are rays of sunshine in the statistics. In a few state surveys, for example, most former welfare recipients report hardship, but still say their lives improved after leaving welfare, according to Sarah Brauner and Pamela J. Loprest's May 1999 study entitled *Where Are They Now? What States' Studies of People Who Left Welfare Tell Us.* In a Wisconsin survey, for example, 69 percent of former welfare recipients reported that "life is better now" and 60 percent don't anticipate returning to welfare. At the same time, the same percentage, 69, also say they're "barely making it," and more than one in three have trouble providing their family with enough food, paying the rent, and utility bills.

Plenty of Jobs, Few Good Ones

Early fears that the whole welfare-to-work initiative might sink in an unreceptive job market are minimized in an August 1998 institute-sponsored study, entitled *Job Prospects for Welfare Recipients: Employers Speak Out*, by Marsha Regenstein, Jack A. Meyer, and Jennifer Dickemper Hicks. The survey was based on interviews with 700 employers in industries with large numbers of entry-level jobs. "Employers have a very open mind about hiring welfare recipients even if they have limited education and training — provided that they have the personal characteristics they find important: reliability and positive attitudes towards work," says Meyer, president of the Economic and Social Research Institute in Washington, D.C.

Only 12 percent of employers rated prior work experience as a "most important" qualification for work and only 4 percent put adequate training in this category. By comparison, 66 percent said reliability and positive work attitude were most important, 39 percent listed strong work ethic, 31 percent cited punctuality, and 16 percent said being friendly and following through on assigned tasks were the most important characteristics.

With the strong economy, economists forecast that the flow of welfare recipients into the work force will not cause problems like raising unemployment rates or displacing low-income workers in many metropolitan areas, according to a June 1999 institute study, *How Well Can Urban Labor Markets Absorb Welfare Recipients?* by Robert I. Lerman, Pamela Loprest, and Caroline Ratcliffe. "On average," the authors write, "our projections show that the 20 metropolitan areas studied will experience decreases in unemployment rates, even with the entry of welfare recipients into the labor force, largely because of growth in low-skill employment." However, this varies across the country. Some labor markets — including Baltimore, New York City, St. Louis, and the District of Columbia — have high initial unemployment rates and will encounter problems.

NEW FEDERALISM
ISSUES AND OPTIONS FOR STATES

How Well Can Urban Labor Markets Absorb Welfare Recipients?

In the study *Job Prospects*, employers voiced concerns about welfare recipients' reliability and work attitudes, but were willing to hire them. In all, 62 percent of

BECAUSE FORMER WELFARE RECIPIENTS ARE NEARLY ALL WOMEN ENTERING THE BOTTOM TIER OF THE LABOR MARKET, URBAN INSTITUTE RESEARCHERS ASSESSED THEIR PROGRESS BY COMPARING THEM WITH LOW-INCOME WOMEN WITH CHILDREN WHO HAD NOT BEEN ON WELFARE.

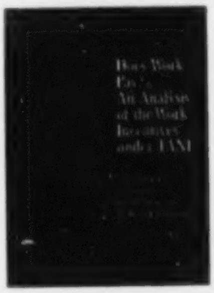
employers have hired a former welfare recipient, and 94 percent of those said they would be willing to hire one again. Among those without experience with welfare recipients as employees, 82 percent said they would likely hire one in the next year.

The jobs available, though, are often part time with very low wages and minimal, if any, benefits: The median entry-level wage paid by surveyed employers was $5.50. Nearly half the jobs are part time. A quarter of the employers offer no benefits, only 17 percent offer paid sick leave, and only 1 percent offer child-care benefits. While nearly half of the businesses provide health-care insurance, the premiums can be costly to employees and coverage may not start for months — or over a year, in nearly a third of the employers surveyed. On top of all this, a staggering 39 percent of employers said their jobs are not accessible by public transportation (even in Los Angeles, nearly 20 percent of employers said their jobs were inaccessible by public transit).

Jobs for former welfare recipients, then, are at the very bottom rung of the labor market. "These sort of jobs aren't bad if they are quite temporary, and people can move up to better jobs," says Meyer. "My own sense is that some workers will go that path, but a lot of people in this country are mired in these jobs. It's kind of a yellow light on welfare reform."

Public Incentives Make Work Attractive

But minimum-wage jobs, in combination with food stamps and low-income tax credits, can lift families out of poverty, concludes a December 1998 institute study, entitled *Does Work Pay? A Summary of the Work Incentives under TANF*, by Norma B. Coe, Gregory Acs, Robert I. Lerman, and Keith Watson. "The central finding is that low-income, single mothers are significantly better off working, even at minimum wage, than relying solely on welfare," the authors say. "Indeed, work pays mainly because of the continued federal financial commitment to working families," primarily through the Earned Income Tax Credit. By 1997, the credit provided up to 40 percent of earnings up to $9,100, or up to $3,640. Without the credit, a person working 35 hours a week 50 weeks a year at the minimum wage of $5.15 in 1997 would have a yearly income of about $9,000 — considerably below the $12,931 poverty level for a family of three. With the credit, the family income approaches the poverty line.



The study uses Colorado, a state that was close to the median of 12 states examined, to demonstrate how a typical mother with two children would fare as she leaves welfare for work. The example below reflects after-tax income from all sources, including TANF benefits, the cash value of food stamps, and tax credits for low-income workers:

- With just public assistance, a mother with two children has a monthly income of $674, which is equal to 68 percent of the federal poverty level.
- With a part-time, minimum-wage job, the mother's monthly income would rise to $1,041, which is equal to 97 percent of the poverty level.

> "THE CENTRAL FINDING IS THAT LOW-INCOME, SINGLE MOTHERS ARE SIGNIFICANTLY BETTER OFF WORKING, EVEN AT MINIMUM WAGE, THAN RELYING SOLELY ON WELFARE. INDEED, WORK PAYS MAINLY BECAUSE OF THE CONTINUED FEDERAL FINANCIAL COMMITMENT TO WORKING FAMILIES."

- With a full-time, minimum-wage job, her monthly income would rise to $1,241, which is equal to 115 percent of the poverty level.

As pay increases, though, income tax credits and food stamp benefits are phased out — creating a situation where a substantial pay hike produces only a minimal net pay raise. For example, a full-time, minimum-wage worker who receives a 75 percent increase in pay, to $9 per hour, would only receive a 16 percent increase in net pay, to $1,478, on average.

Co-author Gregory Acs, a senior research associate at the institute, says that the disincentive to find good-paying jobs also varied with state rules for phasing out benefits. "Oregon adapted our methodology, and found out that in one county a mother with two kids who needed child care would be no better off working at a $12 an hour job with no public assistance than she would be at a $6 an hour job and still receiving the Earned Income Tax Credit, some TANF, and child-care assistance. It was the most glaring example of any I've seen," he says. "As an analyst, I'm not sure what to do about it besides pointing it out."

It's not an easy problem, he says. Government encourages people to take entry-level jobs, even part time at minimum wages, by showing them that it helps them get ahead financially. But how should government phase out benefits in a nation where half the work force earns under $12 an hour? "It's hard to phase out benefits gradually without providing benefits to 50 percent of all workers," Acs says.

For some former welfare recipients, the benefits will start them climbing up a career ladder to jobs with high wages, good benefits, and a future. But for others in poor health or who lack the education, skills, or motivation to climb the career ladder, the benefit structure gives them no incentive to seek better full-time jobs. "It's a trade-off," says Acs.

About the Research Project

Midway through the Assessing the New Federalism project, highlights include:

- A 1997 national survey of 44,000 households and a second one under way in 1999.

RESOURCES FOR WELFARE REFORM

IN ADDITION TO SUPPORTING the Assessing the New Federalism project, the Annie E. Casey Foundation assists several other organizations that provide reliable and timely information about welfare reform and related topics. These organizations include:

The **Welfare Information Network**, a comprehensive clearinghouse for information on welfare policies and programs at both the state and federal level, 1000 Vermont Avenue, NW, Suite 600, Washington, DC 20005, phone: (202) 628-5790, fax: (202) 628-4206, www.welfareinfo.org.

The **Welfare Reform Academy**, which educates state and local officials, private service providers, and other interested individuals about welfare reform, Maryland School of Public Affairs, 2101 Van Munching Hall, College Park, MD 20742, phone: (202) 862-5904, www.welfare-reform-academy.org.

The web site of the **Research Forum for Children, Families, and the New Federalism**, a clearinghouse of information on welfare research projects, which includes an online database of project summaries, National Center for Children in Poverty, 154 Haven Avenue, New York, NY 10032, phone: (212) 304-7150, fax: (212) 544-4200 or 4201, www.researchforum.org.

The **Center for Law and Social Policy**, which uses education, policy research and advocacy to improve the economic security of low-income families, 1616 P Street, NW, Suite 150, Washington, DC 20036, phone: (202) 328-5140, fax: (202) 328-5195, www.clasp.org.

- A data bank, accessible on the Internet, that provides 900 types of social service information for each of 50 states and the District of Columbia. Almost 20,000 researchers, state officials, and advocacy organizations have already used the data bank to compare program designs, expenditures, or indicators of family well-being among states.

- Twenty-six case studies of health, social service, and income support policies in 13 states. For these states, these are the only comprehensive reviews of safety net program design, implementation, and delivery of service.

- Thirty-three policy briefs, designed to quickly brief policymakers on the implications of policy changes, and 26 papers comparing safety net policies across states.

Alan Weil, director of the project and a former director of the Colorado Department of Health Care Policy and Financing, says Assessing the New Federalism fills a vacuum: "Folks concerned about the well-being of families and children realized that we, as a country, really don't have a systematic way of gathering information about state policies and the effects of them. Without this new initiative, it would be very hard to speak with any confidence about what it means for states to define the safety net."

Michael deCourcy Hinds, a former reporter for the New York Times, *is a vice president at the Public Agenda Foundation.*

The Annie E. Casey Foundation
701 St. Paul Street
Baltimore, Maryland 21202
Phone: 410.547.6600
Fax: 410.547.6624
www.aecf.org

Art Direction/Design: Kathryn Shagas
Production: Patty Helphenstine
Map Art: Joanne Cooper
Illustrations: David Suter

Photography:
Tony Stone Images (cover & p. 27)
Lorin Klaris (pp. 12–15)

PAGE 2: WHAT'S IN A NAME?

By Douglas W. Nelson

One of the privileges of working at the Annie E. Casey Foundation has been the opportunity to see firsthand the impact of innovative policies and programs on children, families, and communities. Across the country, my colleagues and I have seen child-welfare, mental-health, and other human-service systems become more effective and efficient in assisting vulnerable children and families. And in many low-income communities, we have witnessed creative individuals and organizations revitalizing neighborhoods and helping provide the basic conditions every family needs to raise children successfully — good schools, for example, safe streets, and employment opportunities for parents.

Because of our experience as partners in reforming child-serving institutions and revitalizing communities, the Trustees and staff of the Casey Foundation are not very sympathetic to the sometimes fashionable notions that "nothing works" and that the impact of domestic public policy is almost always destructive. Such points of view are quite simply, and quite demonstrably, untrue. A related, more salient concern of the Foundation is that many successful strategies for improving child and family outcomes do not adequately inform public debate and policy deliberations. We believe that insufficient public awareness of successful strategies can transform an appropriate skepticism about new policies and programs into a corrosive cynicism — one that inhibits large-scale experiments to strengthen fragile families and to alter the life trajectories of millions of at-risk kids.

One reason that public understanding of successful innovations is limited — and the "nothing works" perspective has any constituency at all — is that foundations, academic institutions, and government have not done a very good job of helping citizens and policymakers reach informed conclusions about the causes of disadvantage, the best approaches to improving child outcomes, and the reasons why some approaches work and others do not. In some cases, important work has not been documented. In others, conclusions about critical issues and programs have been either too timidly advanced or too slowly arrived at to be very useful. And in almost every case, there has been a profound failure to translate findings and analysis into clear, concrete, and accessible language.

ADVOCASEY

The periodical that you now hold in your hands (or are reading online at www.aecf.org) is one small part of the Annie E. Casey Foundation's overall effort to provide data-driven evidence of successful innovations to policymakers, opinion leaders, and the public at large. This work includes perhaps our best known initiative, KIDS COUNT, which is a national and state-by-state effort to document the condition of children and the most promising ways of helping them grow up to be healthy, productive adults. A related initiative, called "Assessing the New Federalism," is a comprehensive, nonpartisan research project conducted by the Urban Institute, a Washington, D.C.–based policy research organization. Because increased authority and responsibility for better outcomes for disadvantaged children have been devolving from the federal government to the states, the Assessing the New Federalism project seeks to help policymakers and other audiences distinguish promising state innovations from those less likely to improve outcomes for children and families.

THE EDITORIAL MISSION OF ADVOCASEY IS TO PROFILE PROGRAMS AND POLICIES THAT HAVE MADE MEASURABLE DIFFERENCES IN THE LIVES OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES.

The editorial mission of ADVOCASEY is to provide accessible, in-depth profiles of programs and policies that have made measurable differences in the lives of children and families. Moreover, we have a particular interest in initiatives that have helped reform child-serving institutions and systems and that have strengthened the physical infrastructure, economic vitality, and social fabric of distressed neighborhoods. Although the Annie E. Casey Foundation funds a number of a new, experimental approaches to improving child and family outcomes, ADVOCASEY will generally restrict its coverage to initiatives that have an established track record.

The stories covered in ADVOCASEY will not be limited to Casey-funded initiatives — although they will predominate because of our detailed knowledge of them. Moreover, editor Bill Rust and his colleagues are committed to producing reports that are as readable as they are substantive.

The Casey Commitment

Finally, the title of this new periodical reflects a core commitment of the Trustees and staff of the Annie E. Casey Foundation — our unabashed advocacy for the best interests of children, particularly disadvantaged children. Moreover, we have a point of view about programs and policies that are in their best interests — a point of view that is pragmatic and informed by data, not anecdotes. Our bottom-line interest is in strategies that work for kids, and we select them from diverse sources — a fact that is sometimes troubling to ideologues of both the left and right.

It has been gratifying to oversee the development of ADVOCASEY and to launch this inaugural issue. I am hopeful that succeeding issues will be as good or better. If you have a moment, please let me know what you think, or e-mail us at webmail@aecf.org.

Douglas W. Nelson is the president of the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

C

DOCUMENTING PROGRAMS THAT WORK FOR KIDS AND FAMILIES

TABLE OF CONTENTS

VOLUME ONE | NUMBER ONE | SPRING 1999

DECAT IN THE HAT 4
IOWA'S SUCCESSFUL FIRST STEP TOWARD DEVOLVING RESOURCES, RESPONSIBILITY, AND ACCOUNTABILITY FOR CHILD AND FAMILY OUTCOMES

PUNISH 'EM, FIX 'EM, MAKE 'EM GO AWAY 13
MULTISYSTEMIC THERAPY HAS A BETTER IDEA

PROMISES TO KEEP 18
AUTONOMY AND ACCOUNTABILITY IN MASSACHUSETTS CHARTER SCHOOLS

ORGANIZING FOR EDUCATION 26
THE ALLIANCE SCHOOLS IN TEXAS

A TALE OF TWO CITIES 32
THE JOBS INITIATIVE IN MILWAUKEE AND ST. LOUIS

RESEARCH AND EVALUATION NOTES 37
RECENT EVALUATIONS OF INITIATIVES THAT IMPROVE CHILD AND FAMILY OUTCOMES, REFORM INSTITUTIONS, AND STRENGTHEN COMMUNITIES

ADVOCASEY *is published by the Annie E. Casey Foundation's Office of External Affairs. Material may be reprinted with appropriate acknowledgment. Articles are also available online at www.aecf.org.*

The Annie E. Casey Foundation is a private charitable organization dedicated to helping build better futures for disadvantaged children in the United States. The primary mission of the Foundation is to foster public policies, human-service reforms, and community supports that more effectively meet the needs of today's vulnerable children and families. In pursuit of this goal, the Foundation makes grants that help states, cities, and neighborhoods fashion more innovative, cost-effective responses to these needs.

The Annie E. Casey Foundation was established in 1948 by Jim Casey, one of the founders of United Parcel Service, and his siblings, who named the Foundation in honor of their mother.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

4

DECAT IN THE HAT

IOWA'S SUCCESSFUL FIRST ST
ACCOUNTABILITY FOR CHILD A

By Bill Rust

Scott County, an urban community in Iowa bounded by the Mississippi River on the east and south, was hit hard by the farm crisis of the 1980s. The county's large agricultural manufacturers, like John Deere, began laying off workers who had good jobs with benefits. For some Scott County families, unemployment and uncertainty exacerbated problems of poor parenting, substance abuse, and family violence. A reflection of the stress on families was the increasing number of children who were removed from their homes and placed in state care.

The economic and child-welfare challenges facing Scott County were experienced to one degree or another in counties throughout Iowa. Between 1982 and 1987, there was a 40 percent increase statewide in the number of children placed in foster care. In addition to the human costs for children and families, the fiscal costs for the state "were really alarming," according to Barry Bennet, a 25-year veteran of the Iowa Department of Human Services (DHS). "Every year we would have to go to the legislature and say, 'We need more money for child welfare.' "

An underlying cause of Iowa's child-welfare crisis was the state's inflexible and uncoordinated "system" of services for troubled children and families. As with most states, Iowa's child-welfare, mental-health, and juvenile-justice systems were highly centralized and communicated poorly with one another. Moreover, the state had few responses to child and family problems other than out-of-home care and expensive institutionalization.

"Ten years ago the system had very few alternatives," says Charles M. Palmer, former director of Iowa's Department of Human Services. "The culture was one of placing children out of the home, out of state, into juvenile correctional settings. I believe that we were way overplacing. And I think it was also, at points in time, a convenience — 'out of sight, out of mind.' "

In the mid-1980s, out-of-home placements consumed about 90 percent of Iowa's child-welfare budget. Only 10 percent was spent on services that might prevent such placements. This service imbalance was self-perpetuating and threatened to consume the entire child-welfare budget. "If you underfund the in-home side," says Mary Nelson, administrator of the state's Division of Adult, Children and Family Services, "you inevitably will create more need for out-of-home care."

The excessive emphasis of the Iowa child-welfare system on foster care and group care was encouraged by inflexible state and federal child-welfare funding streams that created financial incentives to remove children from their homes. Out-of-home care was basically an open-ended entitlement; in-home care — for example, counseling, family preservation services, or therapy — had a fixed budget. "If you ran out of money, you ran out of money," recalls Gary Lippe, the DHS administrator for Dubuque County. "If you needed transportation, child care, anything that might enable a child to remain safely with his family, there was no source of money."

Impressive Results

In 1987 the Iowa General Assembly responded to the child-welfare crisis by directing DHS to develop a pilot project that would allocate state resources based on the actual needs of children and families, rather than the requirements of inflexible funding streams. Called Decategorization, and informally known as "Decat," the project combined a dozen or more separate state and state-federal funding sources, each with different service definitions and eligibility requirements, into a single locally controlled fund. Designed to reduce the child-welfare system's reliance upon institutional, out-of-community, and out-of-home care, Decategorization encouraged the local development of a full range of preventive and treatment services.

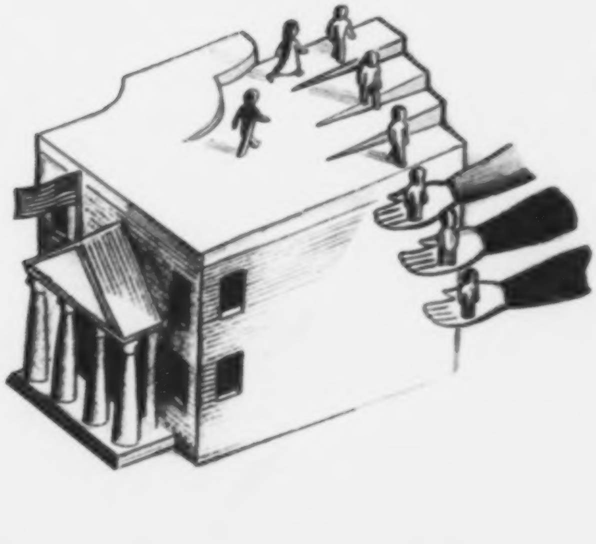
Over the past decade, Decategorization has spread to 98 of Iowa's 99 counties and become the foundation of a statewide effort to develop a more discriminating, cost-effective system of child welfare and juvenile justice. Decat initially appealed to legislators because it was "revenue neutral" — i.e., no new state money. It was attractive to communities because any savings that resulted from Decategorization could be reinvested in local child-welfare services rather than returned to the state treasury.

Over time, however, the financial incentives of Decategorization became less important than the growing realization among legislators and communities that devolving resources, authority, and accountability had produced measurable child-welfare improvements. "Decat allowed communities to experiment and innovate," says Charles Bruner, a former Iowa state senator who was instrumental in the passage of the Decategorization legislation. "It has created laboratories for changed child-welfare practice, and some of the results have been pretty impressive."

According to the Iowa Department of Human Services, statewide results for Decategorization include:

- A 21 percent decline in out-of-state placements between 1994 and 1998.
- A $15.5 million savings in 1998 out-of-home expenditures that can be retained by counties and reinvested in preventive services.

"IOWA'S DECATEGORIZATION INITIATIVE HAS DEMONSTRATED THAT DECISION MAKING AND AUTHORITY CAN BE SUCCESSFULLY DEVOLVED FROM THE STATE TO THE COMMUNITY LEVEL."



- A systemwide shift in child-welfare spending. In 1991, 87 percent of the budget was spent on out-of-home care and 13 percent for in-home services. In 1998, 57 percent was spent on out-of-home care and 43 percent for in-home care.

Although the statewide results are striking, the impact of Decat is most evident in those counties that have creatively implemented the legislation. Sharing general characteristics — for example, less reliance on remote institutional and out-of-home care — Decat counties have considerable diversity in their respective approaches to child welfare. "[T]he essence of Decategorization," wrote the authors of an evaluation

> "DECAT HAS CREATED LABORATORIES FOR CHANGED CHILD-WELFARE PRACTICE, AND SOME OF THE RESULTS HAVE BEEN PRETTY IMPRESSIVE."

by the Human Services Research Institute, "is each community responding to its own needs and strengths."

Four examples of creative community responses — in Scott, Dubuque, Linn, and Cass, Mills, and Montgomery counties — are profiled below.

Meeting Actual Needs — Scott County

In August 1988 the Iowa Department of Human Services selected Scott County as one of two pilot sites for Decategorization. (The other, Polk County, is discussed in "Becky: A Case Study in Wraparound Services" on page 8.) One reason for Scott County's selection was its history of cooperation among the three major agencies that, by state law, would govern the project: the local DHS office, the juvenile court, and the county board of supervisors. With assistance from the Center for the Study of Social Policy, a Washington, D.C.–based think tank with expertise in human services and government finance, Scott County began an intense planning process aimed at rethinking its entire system of child-welfare, juvenile-justice, and children's mental-health services.

"Decat was very, very exciting at the beginning," says Mary Dubert, director of the Scott County Department of Community Services. "It was not just figuring out what will we do about this [specific child-welfare] problem. It was how are we going to look at this differently? How do we get the best for kids? What is the child-welfare system really trying to do?"

Like most Decategorization projects, Scott County initially focused on the high-need, high-cost kids in the system. Targeting juveniles placed in the state's Eldora Training School for delinquents, the project returned children to the county by opening Iowa's first secure residential facility run by a private nonprofit. To reduce the number of children placed in local residential care, essentially group homes with more intensive services, Scott County developed an After Day-Treatment Program (ADP) that provided care and support for kids during and after school and into the evening. One parent whose child participated in the program told evaluators, "We wouldn't be together as a family, if not for ADP."

Between 1989 and 1992, Scott County decreased its admissions to the Eldora Training School and the Toledo Juvenile Home for youth with severe behavioral problems by 60 percent. Acknowledging that some children will always need out-of-home and institutional care, officials in Scott County are convinced that most children can be served in the community and in their homes. To do this, they have used Decat's flexibility to shift funds and services to fit the specific circumstances of families.

"With gaps in services and fragmented systems, if the service you actually needed were not available, you would move a family or a child up to a higher level of a service that was beyond their need," says Dennis Timmermann, the Scott County administrator for the Department of Human Services. "Building a continuum and putting [some children and families] into preventive services is meeting their actual need."

Pat Hendrickson, Scott County's chief juvenile court officer, cites another advantage to serving selected juvenile offenders in their homes. "We've dramatically increased our restitution collections and payments to victims," she says. "And people understand that kids can't earn restitution if they're locked up."

Far-Reaching Effects — Dubuque County

A Decat site since 1990, Dubuque County has been successful in changing inflexible "cookie cutter" child-welfare services to a more discriminating system of care that, when necessary, can provide individualized help to families. "We start with the premise, 'What would this family need for the child to live at home and be treated there?' " says Gary Lippe, the Dubuque County DHS administrator. "As opposed to saying, 'The services we have available are foster care, group care, and in-home therapy. Which is the right one?' "

One of the ways Dubuque County addressed the needs of troubled families was through "case facilitation," a process that includes the family, social workers, neighbors, educators, and other interested parties who meet regularly to develop a case plan. The Dubuque County Decat project hired a full-time case facilitator who led these meetings and identified gaps in services. Case facilitation encourages front-line social workers to look for alternatives to traditional services and consider the whole range of preventive and treatment services for children and families.

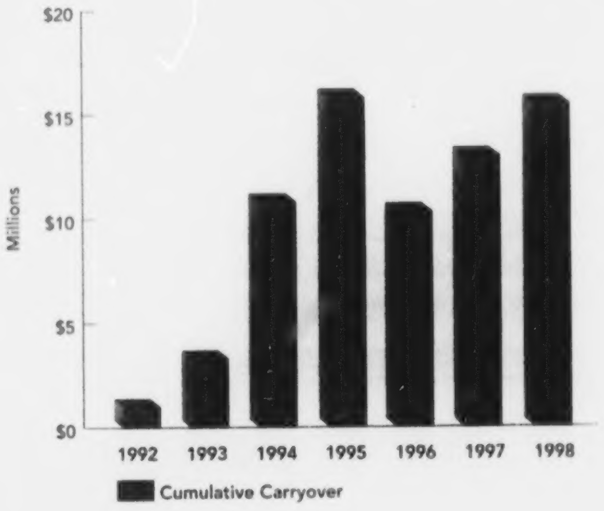
The evaluation of Decategorization by the Human Services Research Institute called the effects of case facilitation in Dubuque "far reaching: Families have become more equal partners in the planning and decision making over services, new services were created out of the needs of individual families, agencies were forced to address turf issues and work more cooperatively on the team, new service providers have been brought into the fold, front-line workers gained greater understanding and commitment to the philosophies associated with Decategorization, and out-of-county placements were reduced while in-home services were dramatically increased."

According to the Iowa Department of Human Services, Dubuque County was able to reduce its placements in group care by 60 percent between 1990 and 1997. Over this same period, the county also

(continued on page 9)

REINVESTING IN PREVENTIVE SERVICES

A key characteristic of Decategorization is that local savings from reductions in out-of-home and institutional care can be reinvested in preventive services. In 1998 the cumulative total for reinvestment was $15.5 million.



Source: Iowa Department of Human Services

"BECKY" A CASE STUDY IN WRAPAROUND SERVICES

> "WE FOUND THAT WHEN YOU REALLY WANT TO TALK ABOUT A TREATMENT PLAN FOR THE HARD CASES, THE HARDEST ONE PERCENT, YOU HAD TO INVOLVE THE FAMILIES."

THE DAUGHTER OF TEENAGE PARENTS who separated before her first birthday, Becky[1] lived with various members of her father's family until her first foster-care placement at age three. She had suffered neglect and sexual abuse from an unknown number of perpetrators. Aggressive, defiant, and acting out sexually, Becky bounced from one foster home to another. By age 10, she had been placed in four residential facilities and psychiatric hospitals, one of which refused to consider ever accepting her again after discharge.

Becky was diagnosed with post traumatic stress disorder and oppositional defiance disorder when she was referred to the Decat project in Polk County, which is the most populous county in Iowa and includes Des Moines. The project put together a team to provide Wraparound services, which blend the funding and resources of several agencies into a comprehensive, individualized treatment plan. The planning team included a psychiatrist, social worker, juvenile court officer, educator, foster parent, and Decat facilitator.

A key member of the planning team was Becky's mother, who for many years had not been a part of her daughter's life. Overcoming a substance-abuse problem, she had remarried and was drug free. She reentered Becky's life when the child was referred to Decat, and she wanted to participate in the treatment planning.

"We found that when you really want to talk about a treatment plan for the hard cases, the hardest one percent, you had to involve the families," says Barry Bennet, Iowa's Decategorization program manager. "'What kind of outcomes do you want? What can you bring to the table? What are you willing to do?' Out of that would come a better plan."

The first step in treating Becky was a rigorous behavior-management program in the hospital. For the first time in her life, Becky was able to control her bowels. Gradually transitioning out of the hospital, Becky spent several hours a day off site with a child-care provider and then returned to the hospital. After several weeks, she eventually went home to her mother and stepfather. In-home services to the family included specialized child care, parenting education, transportation, and respite care that provided needed relief for caregivers.

Becky, now 13, has lived with her mother and stepfather for three years. Her behavior has improved dramatically, and she attends public school. She is no longer an open child-welfare case, and no services are currently provided.

Becky's 29 months of Wraparound services cost $65,000. Had she remained in a psychiatric hospital, where there was little likelihood of effective treatment, the cost would have been $114,000.

Becky's successful treatment has been characteristic of Polk County's Wraparound services. Seventy-seven percent of the children who have received individualized case planning have either been successfully treated in their homes or in stable foster-care settings. According to the Iowa Department of Human Services, the average daily cost of such treatment is $59, compared with $110 per day in group care.

---

[1] *Not her real name.*

(continued from page 7)

reduced placements into family foster care by about one-third. "Originally our thinking was that if we move kids out of group care, they'll probably go to family foster care," says Gary Lippe. "But actually we found that wasn't true. They didn't go to family foster care; they usually went home."

To help prevent children from ever entering the formal child-welfare system, Dubuque County established a crisis-intervention program that responds quickly to families who voluntarily request the service. A local nonprofit service provider, Lutheran Social Services, works with the families for up to 21 days to help resolve the crisis, connect them with other services in the community, and avoid when possible judicial hearings, out-of-home placements, and other time-consuming and expensive child-welfare practices and procedures.

In 1997 more than 80 percent of the families in the crisis-intervention program were effectively served and did not become open child-welfare cases. "Almost all of those," says Lippe, "would have at least been a shelter placement and probably an ongoing court case had they not been diverted."

Make It Real — Linn County

When asked about the early days of Decategorization in Linn County, local DHS administrator Marc Baty is hardly sentimental. He recalls the growing pains of collaborating with different agencies and the turmoil caused by a legislatively imposed cap on group care in Iowa. The biggest achievement of the first year, says Baty: "We survived."

Taking a longer view, however, he explains how Decategorization has set the stage for far-reaching reform of the public systems serving children and families. "What Decat has done," he says, "is provide the citizens, the consumers, the different community representatives and resources throughout Iowa, an opportunity to participate in a much more meaningful sense in the governance of their communities' affairs as it pertains to families and children."

To translate the rhetoric of Decategorization into concrete action, Linn County adapted the Patch model of service delivery. Originating in Great Britain, where "patch" is a term for neighborhood, the Patch approach seeks to make social services more responsive and less bureaucratic by bringing together a team of public and private providers in a community-based center. The Linn County community initially served by Patch was a small inner-city neighborhood on the southeast side of Cedar Rapids.

The decision to locate the team there was based, in part, on the results of a study by the Child and Family Policy Center in Des Moines. Analyzing "the geography of foster care," the study showed that inner-city children in Cedar Rapids were five times more likely to be removed from their homes than other Linn County children. Baty characterizes the foster-care study as "the beginning, in a very embryonic way, of having informed decision making based on relevant data."

A key characteristic of the Patch service approach is an emphasis on participating with communities and their residents instead of merely transferring resources. According to a University of Iowa evaluation of the Patch project, "Local citizens and consumers play an indispensable role in the development of the patch process, and need to be fully incorporated in advisory boards, selection committees, and wherever possible in the work and training of the team. They need to be seen as major partners in and contributors to the caring capacity of the community, not simply as current and potential recipients of services."

To help establish family resource centers throughout Linn County, the Decat project used its carry-over dollars to support the Family Resource Development Association (FRDA), whose more than 30 members include municipal, county, and state government, schools, nonprofits, and neighborhood associations. The family resource centers operated by FRDA blend government services such as Head Start with parent groups and other community resources. Baty calls FRDA "an opportunity to learn how to balance self-interest, enterprise, and the common good."

Expanding the circle of community collaboration even further, Cedar Rapids was selected as one of four cities nationally to participate in Community Partnerships to Protect Children. Taking a comprehensive approach to preventing and responding to child maltreatment, the initiative is funded by the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation and managed by the Center for the Study of Social Policy.

"It took us about five years to really understand what we were involved with with Decategorization," concludes Baty. "That's only because we actually rolled our sleeves up, sat around a table, and started talking about it. You have to make it real."

A Big Change — Cass, Mills, and Montgomery Counties

Three rural counties in southwestern Iowa — Cass, Mills, and Montgomery — "went Decat" in 1995, establishing a partnership called the Coalition for Families. Although rural counties are often said to lack the resources for effective human-service programming, this three-county cluster has developed an impressive array of services, including programs serving parents and their children ages 0–4, school-age children, and teenagers. In its first year of operation, the Cass-Mills-Montgomery Decategorization project reduced group-care expenditures by 15 percent.

"We have very good working relations with [the nonprofit service] providers in our area," says Carol Gutchewsky, the DHS administrator for the three counties. "We have good working relations with churches and community groups in our area. We have people who are willing to commit to participating in planning for child welfare."

"THE ESSENCE OF DECATEGORIZATION IS EACH COMMUNITY RESPONDING TO ITS OWN NEEDS AND STRENGTHS."

The cluster's Decat governing board includes parents, one of whom raised fundamental questions about the three counties' traditional in-home counseling services. Put simply, these services did not seem to be doing much good for the children and families receiving them. "We had cases that were open for two years, three years," says Gutchewsky. "And people didn't seem to be able to disengage from services."

Questions about the family-centered services prompted the local DHS office to review with families and their caseworkers the specific issues that brought them into the system and their goals to address these issues. Combined with more focused initial assessments of families' needs, this process has dramatically decreased caseloads and the expense of keeping families in the child-welfare system for long periods of time. Cases are typically closed between 90 and 120 days, instead of the old average of a year or more.

As with many Iowa counties, Decat has helped the Cass-Mills-Montgomery cluster transform the

THE CASEY FOUNDATION IN IOWA

OVER THE PAST DECADE the Annie E. Casey Foundation has granted more than $5 million to public and private organizations in Iowa that are working to improve health, education, and social outcomes for disadvantaged children. A leader in reforming public systems serving children and families, Iowa received its first Casey Foundation grant for early efforts to decategorize funding for child-welfare services. In a state proud of its longstanding commitment to families, Decategorization reflects a bipartisan consensus that most families, even troubled ones, can do a better job of raising children than the government.

More recently, the Iowa Department of Human Services was awarded funds to help implement the 1998 Community Empowerment Area Legislation, which will enable citizens to play a key role in child and family initiatives. This grant will support efforts to increase the capacity of local Community Empowerment Boards to partner effectively with state and local government, to integrate the Decategorization Boards into the Community Empowerment Boards, and to develop accountability systems that monitor outcomes of changing state and community relationships.

Among the private organizations in Iowa that have received Casey Foundation support is the Child and Family Policy Center in Des Moines. Its diverse portfolio of work includes the Iowa KIDS COUNT profiles of the condition of children, and technical assistance to organizations seeking to make public systems work better for children and families. The Move the Mountain Leadership Center in Ames has received Foundation funding to strengthen the ability of community and government leaders to manage people and institutions through processes of change.

The Casey Foundation's grants to reform public systems serving children and families in Iowa and other states share a common set of principles and strategies. They include developing reliable data for planning and decision making, emphasizing prevention and early intervention over remediation, drawing on resources that cut across formal institutional boundaries, involving communities in decisions about the delivery of services, and establishing accountability systems that measure the impact of services on the lives of children and families.

traditionally adversarial relationship between social workers and parents. The engagement of families in helping define their own needs and objectives is "a big change for us," says Gutchewsky. "We aren't holding hammers over people's heads, but we are still getting results."

Not a Panacea

Despite its accomplishments, Decategorization is not a panacea for the many serious child-welfare problems facing states. Decat can neither end child abuse and neglect, nor compensate for insufficient funding of child-welfare, mental-health, and juvenile-justice services. Moreover, in Iowa, the impact of Decategorization has varied greatly from county to county. Although some have been strategic in their analysis of child-welfare issues and their application of limited resources, others have taken an ineffective "scatter gun" approach to developing services.

"Particularly initially, some communities would ask, 'What do people want to do that they can show there's a need for?'" says Mary Nelson, administrator of the *Division of Adult, Children and Family Services.* "Well, there are a number of innovative programs that would be good to do in a community, but they may not have a direct impact on referrals to the child-welfare and juvenile-justice systems."

As with other collaborative governing bodies, Decat's shared authority and joint decision making seem sensible but are seldom easy. To succeed, the process needs local leaders who can transcend turf issues and act in the best interests of children and families. "Decategorization is arguing one priority over another," says former DHS director Palmer. "There are hard decisions on what you don't do because you want to do more of something else. That requires people who are able to come together and work for win-win."

Time consuming for decision makers, Decat also places new demands on front-line workers, whose role has been shifting from social workers who have a relatively simple range of choices for families to case managers who coordinate a wide range of preventive and treatment services. "It's a challenge for front-line staff to individualize services and arrange for special needs," says Gary Lippe, DHS administrator for Dubuque County. "It's a lot easier to slide [children and families] into a program that already exists."

Building Frames, Painting Pictures

Iowa's Decategorization initiative has demonstrated that decision making and authority can be successfully devolved from the state to the community level. It has also shown that local agencies can be prudent and responsible with public funds and achieve results. "There is skepticism in government and the private sector about the 'value added' of shifting decision making to communities," says Ira Barbell, a senior associate and child-welfare expert at the Annie E. Casey Foundation. "One of the most impressive things about Decat is the negotiated partnership between the state and communities, which not only meets the needs of kids but also does it in a cost-effective way."

Decategorization has contributed to a growing interest in Iowa to broadening both the range of services governed locally and the representation on collaborative governing boards. In 1998 the Iowa General Assembly passed Community Empowerment Area Legislation, which "will enable local citizens to lead collaborative efforts involving health, education, and human services programs on behalf of children."

As with Decategorization, it may take years before the effectiveness of local Community Empowerment Area Boards can be accurately gauged. But Mary Dubert of Scott County and many other officials, legislators, and citizens in Iowa are optimistic that the state and communities can effectively balance their respective roles and responsibilities in the best interest of children and families. "There will always be a need for some type of state consistency," says Dubert, "but at that level, policymakers and policy implementers should be building the frame, and local communities should be painting the picture inside the frame. That's how you get the best of both worlds."

Bill Rust is the editor of ADVOCASEY.

PUNISH 'EM, FIX 'EM, MAKE 'EM GO AWAY

MULTISYSTEMIC THERAPY HAS A BETTER IDEA

By Patrice Pascual

As a community-based therapist for destructive adolescents, Mark Demidovich has heard it all, and often. Who would want to live next door to a child like 12-year-old Robert, so aggressive that his mother can no longer let him walk to the mailbox because he threatens the neighbors? Juvenile crime rates may be down, but that is little comfort to someone afraid of the boy next door. Demidovich understands the fears, but he assuredly does not want any of his three young clients taken from their homes.

His boss, clinical psychologist Scott Henggeler, has spent nearly half his 48 years figuring, and then proving, that juvenile toughs, sex offenders, and drug abusers are more likely to reform when they receive home-based therapeutic services instead of out-of-home care. Since 1992 he has done that work as director of the Family Services Research Center of the Medical University of South Carolina. Henggeler's message may not resonate with a skittish public favoring boot camps and incarceration, but data on Henggeler's Multisystemic Therapy (MST) treatment model have been winning the attention of policy leaders with words rarely heard in mental-health programs — cost savings and results.

MST requires intensive services to troubled youth and insists on examining antisocial behavior through the context of natural environments — home, neighborhood, and school. Take a youth from that setting, Henggeler says, and he (and they are nearly all "he's") will not learn to solve real-world problems. Put him in group care and he may learn more antisocial habits from deviant peers. Be on call for him and his family 24 hours a day, seven days a week, for about four months, and then you can start thinking about outcomes.

MST is not just for adolescents. Henggeler and his staff of 50 are targeting MST services to many populations, including drug-using teen parents, and abused toddlers. So far, approximately 150 therapists have taken MST training, and 2,500 children receive services each year.

> MST HAS BEEN WINNING THE ATTENTION OF POLICY LEADERS WITH WORDS RARELY HEARD IN MENTAL-HEALTH PROGRAMS — COST SAVINGS AND RESULTS.

The MST model demands "accountability," "incentives," and "cost benefits," says Henggeler, sounding like mental-health's version of corporate quality guru W. Edwards Deming. Reward therapists for a client's future outcomes. Remove those who don't adhere to treatment principles. Look for long-term, lower rates of recidivism and imprisonment for those who have received MST services. Compare MST's treatment costs of roughly $4,500 per juvenile to $10,000 or more for his incarceration.

Data and Accolades

Empirical data have won MST accolades from states and policy groups and more than $9 million in funding from the federal government. Shay Bilchik, administrator of the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, lauded MST's "excellent program design." South Carolina's Health and Human Services Department rewrote its Medicaid standards with Henggeler, making MST the protocol for home-based services. In 1997 a national panel convened by Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence reviewed 450 programs before choosing MST among the nation's 10 most promising programs for preventing violence and crime.

In 1998 MST was ranked by the Washington State Institute for Public Policy as the most cost-effective of 16 major crime-cutting programs. The institute estimated that MST graduates would commit 44 percent fewer felonies than juvenile offenders who did not receive MST treatment, and that the drop in crime would save state taxpayers and victims roughly $22,000 for each felony avoided.

With projections like that, what is stopping MST from being implemented in every neighborhood with a wayward kid?

Part of the answer is Henggeler himself. An enthusiastic man committed to the mental health of children, he is also a cautious scientist who eschews "silver bullets." Although his treatment and consultation manuals are in the public domain, MST is not, he stresses, an off-the-shelf package for changing the complex delivery systems of mental-health programs. Henggeler, who has launched a for-profit company to faithfully disseminate the MST model, is working with colleagues to evaluate potential obstacles, such as treatment adherence and service funding. He wants to go slow and to keep close tabs on the research, because he is well aware of what he does not know. "We have a shot to get outcomes," says Henngeler, "and we don't want to blow that shot."

"MST IS ONE OF THE MOST — IF NOT THE MOST — EFFECTIVE APPROACHES FOR TOUGH KIDS."

Another answer is this: Because MST argues that the dominant strategy of removing troubled children from their homes is a doomed treatment, Henggeler is challenging the way children's mental health has operated for decades. "Seventy percent of child mental health dollars are spent on out-of-home treatment," he says. "We want to change the *zeitgeist* of moving kids out of the community."

With that message, it is hardly surprising when Keller Strother, president of MST Services, Inc., admits, "Scott's not very welcome at conferences, even though he's a keynote speaker."

At least Henggeler has not been literally booed out of a meeting, as was Case Western Reserve University psychologist and MST convert Jane Timmons-Mitchell. Two years ago, when she tried to present MST at an Ohio conference of mental-health and juvenile-justice agencies, colleagues disrupted her talk. "I've been surprised by some things in my career, but people there knew me and knew I wasn't a kook," she says. She is gratified, however, that the agency presenting that conference has recently become a MST dissemination site, even though another told her that it could not accept MST because "they were in the business of institutions."

Home-Based Care

Henggeler says MST is most easily accepted by budget mavens, social workers, and data-loving psychologists. Psychiatrists, he says, ask, "Is it safe [to go into a client's home]? What about boundaries?" He is laughing now — his wife, Melisa Rowland, is a psychiatrist working on his staff. But the questions are legitimate.

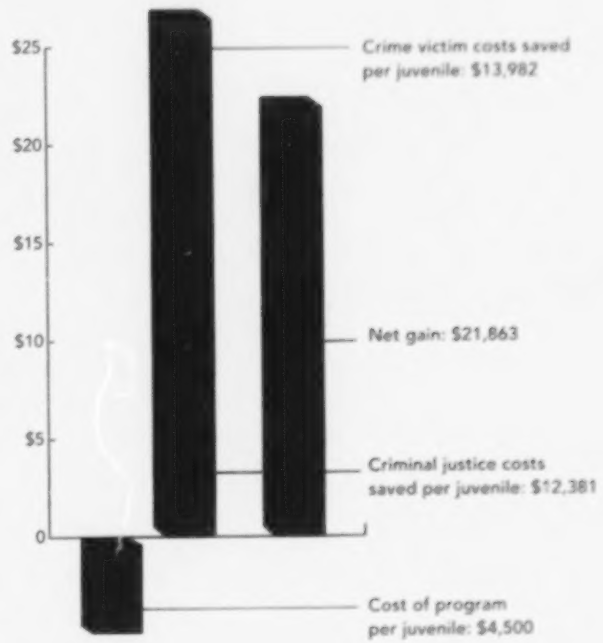
It was, in fact, a social worker who led Henggeler to home-based care. As an intern the University of Virginia's Department of Pediatrics in the mid-1970s, he was brash enough to suspect that established doctors knew nothing about reaching troubled youth. He recalls reading lengthy psychological assessments that included just a single sentence on

CUTTING CRIME WITH MST

In 1998 the Washington State Institute for Public Policy estimated that MST graduates would commit 44 percent fewer felonies than juvenile offenders who did not receive MST treatment, and that the drop in crime would save state taxpayers and victims roughly $22,000 for each felony avoided.

Source: Washington State Institute for Public Policy

TAXPAYER AND VICTIM COSTS SAVED



proposed treatment. If there was no plan, there were certainly no results.

Henggeler shared his frustration with one of his supervisors, a social worker who suggested he visit his clients at home. "I'd walk in the door and within 15 minutes I'd know how stupid my treatment plan was," he recalls. Mom might be making excuses for her child's behavior, instead of reinforcing treatment. Grandpa may be sexually abusive. Or an antisocial peer might be regularly camping out on the couch. None of which may have come up in outpatient treatment sessions.

"In the office, you're making clinical decisions on a small amount of data," says Henggeler. "The real advantage to home-based care is more valid assessment data," which is critical to developing effective treatment and creating positive outcomes. Early on, Henggeler was encouraged by sociologist Urie Bronfenbenner's theory of social ecology, which suggests that individuals are simultaneously involved in and affected by reciprocal systems, such as family, peers, and neighborhood. See an individual's problems in the context of those systems, Henggeler concluded, and a therapist has hope of understanding, and improving, a young person's life.

Yet dropping in on what is probably a chaotic family scene is not for the uninitiated. MST's treatment manual for supervisors is replete with guidance on winning the "engagement" or cooperation of family members; on evaluating when one's personal dislike of a family member is getting in the way of effective treatment; on handling fear for personal safety; and on minimizing burnout in a job that requires intense, several-month engagement with three or four families at a time. The manual also suggests matching the ethnic background of the therapist to the family receiving care, although MST has worked in cross-cultural studies.

Home-based work has taught Scott Henggeler what it means when a parent greets him with a gun ("He said the family wouldn't be needing my services anymore.") and that therapists deserve real incentives — in pay, supervisor support, and benefits — to encourage them to work with complicated families.

It has taught psychologist Cindy Cupit Swenson practical measures — for example, when working in a community with an illegal drug market, you wave to, but never stop to talk to, police officers, and once you are accepted by that community, you never make promises you cannot keep.

Therapist Mark Demidovich has learned that failed treatments exhaust families. One mother he had labeled as cruelly indifferent to her son, he later realized, had given up hope that anything Demidovich could suggest would get better results than the nine interventions her family had gone through before MST. When he stopped making recommendations and simply shared his concerns, she began to trust him and work with him to help her son.

"The level of parent psychopathology overwhelms [therapists]," says psychiatrist Melisa Rowland. She co-leads the four-year, NIMH-funded randomized study that compares MST to regular services for youth on the verge of psychiatric hospitalization. Lack of competent caregivers appears to increase the need for MST-treated youth to receive temporary hospitalization, and although the total number of days confined was cut by 72 percent under MST, 43 percent of MST youth needed some hospital placement.

> "IN THE OFFICE, YOU'RE MAKING CLINICAL DECISIONS ON A SMALL AMOUNT OF DATA. THE REAL ADVANTAGE TO HOME-BASED CARE IS MORE VALID ASSESSMENT DATA."

That trial will be concluded this year, although a final report will not be issued until Medicaid costs can be included in 2000. Still, Rowland admitted she was humbled by client need for hospital services, concluding that for some of this population, "There is a role for a safe setting and getting them medically stabilized."

Treatment Fidelity

Other current MST research includes independent randomized trials in Texas and Delaware, a five-year follow-up of drug-abusing juveniles who received MST services in South Carolina, and an extensive evaluation of factors that best promote treatment adherence, from the type of agency administering services to the way it pays for treatment. Treatment fidelity has already been proven critical in replicating Henggeler's successes, which explains his concern for agencies independently adapting his model. "If they can pull it off, more power to them," he says. But if they can't prove results through randomized trials, he is developing mechanisms to help. "If I have to be involved [in every MST project]," he says, "it's not worth doing."

In 1996 Henggeler created MST Services, Inc., a for-profit company that now has 10 staffers providing clinical training and technical support. The company participates in early stakeholder meetings to explain the model and expects to stay on-call for two to three years thereafter, until a quality, self-sufficient program is in place. Cost varies by the size of the system, but there is no doubt that up-front cost for MST training is an expense some agencies resist.

"The money is a hard sell," says Case Western's Jane Timmons-Mitchell, unless one can get the attention of the staff who pays for out-of-home care, and who see the same youth bounce in and out of systems. "I tell them, 'You're already spending the money, you might as well spend it wisely.'"

Agencies who invest in MST training can become treatment licensees. Youth Villages in Tennessee, which has integrated MST into a continuum of care — including residential — is now under contract to the State of Mississippi to provide MST services, and is sending counselors to Mississippi and Arkansas to provide in-home services to former residents of Youth Villages.

Henggeler is preparing to pilot his own continuum service models in Boston and Philadelphia, with funding from the Annie E. Casey Foundation. "MST is one of the most — if not the most — effective approaches for tough kids," says Patrick McCarthy, the Casey Foundation's director for Policy Reform and Initiative Management. "If MST can improve the quality of mental-health services in a variety of neighborhood settings, it would be a significant contribution to the field and to our own work in low-income communities."

For those unprepared to hire support from MST Services, Henggeler has created the free MST Institute, with an online adherence component (www.mstinstitute.org). He hopes those agencies that haven't worked with MST Services will use it to test their programs and share results.

Changing Treatment Practice

While MST may win the heart of a system's chief financial officer, convincing staff professionals to change treatment practice can remain daunting. Jane Timmons-Mitchell recalls a mother with a "crisis orientation" whom a MST therapist had weaned from overdependence on agency services. When her family ended weeks of MST support, the agency sent a caseworker, untrained in MST, to visit the family. From that caseworker's perspective, old crisis issues demonstrated that the mother was unprepared to care for her family, and her children were removed from the home.

Timmons-Mitchell believes that an MST-trained caseworker would have kept the family together, and that people are being hurt by inconsistent treatment orientations. She quotes George Bernard Shaw's plaint: "Why have you exposed me to this new life, if you're not willing to help me live it?"

Lee Rone, regional director of Tennessee's Youth Villages, agrees that the MST principles must be applied to all phases of treatment. "That's not an automatic," he says. "It takes a cultural shift in the way people think about treatment."

While Henggeler and his staff struggle to address that issue for agencies and clients, his South Carolina employees say he has conquered that challenge in-house. "He is a visionary, and he makes things happen," says psychologist Cynthia Cupit Swenson. "He has an incredible way of fitting people to the project to capitalize on their strengths, and that's what we do with families. We're living out our philosophy."

To that, Henggeler might reply, show me the data.

Patrice Pascual, a writer who specializes in children's issues, was recently appointed managing editor of the Benton Foundation's Connect for Kids *project.*

PROMISES TO KEEP

"Disappointing" or "troubling" or "numbing" were typical public characterizations of the scores on the new standardized exams for public-school students in Massachusetts. Released in November, the results of the demanding Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) tests revealed that a majority of the state's 4th-, 8th-, and 10th-graders scored in the "failing" and "needs improvement" performance levels for math and science. The English scores were hardly better. Of the three grades tested, only 8th-graders had a majority of students statewide who scored in the "proficient" and "advanced" levels.

Like other standardized tests across the nation, the MCAS (pronounced "M-cass") exams confirmed that schools and districts with high proportions of low-income students posted the lowest scores. At a December meeting of the Massachusetts Board of Education, John Silber, then chairman of the board, said that the MCAS scores reflected a "crisis in public education."

Yet Silber and other education officials also stressed that the first annual MCAS exams were tangible proof of the state's commitment to high standards of academic achievement. Calling the tests a powerful diagnostic tool that can help students, schools, and districts, Massachusetts Education Commissioner David Driscoll said that the 1998 MCAS scores provided a "baseline" for analyzing trends and measuring progress in meeting the new academic standards.

Although cautious about drawing inferences from a single assessment, many educators and analysts have urged a closer look at schools in low-income communities that had comparatively high MCAS scores. One such school is the Neighborhood House Charter School in the Dorchester neighborhood of Boston. It not only outscored other elementary schools in the Boston district in math and science, but also bettered the state average in the "proficient" and "advanced" categories for English.

Neighborhood House Headmaster Kevin Andrews, a passionate educator who views his school's MCAS scores with a little pride but no complacency, says he is not particularly interested in comparisons with other public schools in Boston.

Kk Ll Mm Nn Oo Pp

His job is to help prepare students for the state's highest-performing public and private schools. To achieve that, says Andrews, "We have to do better."

Institutional Innovation

Like other charter schools, Neighborhood House is a tuition-free, nonsectarian institution open to any student in Massachusetts. (In the case of overenrollment, students are selected by lottery.) Subject to health, civil-rights, and other federal and state laws governing public education, charter schools are free from district regulations and collective-bargaining agreements. In exchange for this freedom, Neighborhood House and other charter schools are held accountable for educational results by the chartering agency in Massachusetts, the state Board of Education. If charter schools do not produce results, they can be shut down.

Neighborhood House Charter School has many characteristics of successful schools across the country. In addition to having high expectations for its students and "succeed anywhere standards," the school is small — about 150 students, more than half of whom are from low-income families and three-quarters of whom are African American and Latino. According to education researchers, small schools, whether freestanding or schools-within-schools, provide more instructional flexibility in responding to the learning styles of individual children. Indeed, a distinguishing characteristic of Neighborhood House Charter School is that each student has an individualized learning plan.

As with most successful schools, the parents of students enrolled at Neighborhood House Charter School are deeply engaged in their children's education. Before a child enrolls, parents sign a "family learning contract" that, although not legally binding, commits them to providing a work space at home for schoolwork, attending conferences, and contributing eight hours of volunteer work per year to the school. A Parent Center at Neighborhood House serves as a hub for reaching out to families and engaging them in school affairs.

Perhaps what is most distinctive about Neighborhood House Charter School is that its leaders — unlike their district counterparts — have control over hiring and firing teachers, the school's budget, and the educational program. "Charter schools are an institutional innovation," says Bruno V. Manno, a senior fellow at the Annie E. Casey Foundation and co-author of a forthcoming book on charter schools.[1] "It's the structure of these schools and the governance of these schools that are typically their most innovative feature."

Because Neighborhood House and the other initial charter schools in Massachusetts opened in 1995, it is still too soon to make confident assessments of their academic effectiveness. In general, charter schools did as well or slightly better on the MCAS exams than public schools in the corresponding host districts. On the other hand, some Massachusetts charter schools performed worse. "The only reasonable conclusion," according to Linda Brown, director of the Charter School Resource Center at the Boston-based Pioneer Institute, "is that charter schools, like their host districts, have a lot of room for improvement."

---

[1] *Charter Schools in Action: Renewing Public Education* (Princeton University Press) by Chester E. Finn, Jr., Bruno V. Manno, and Gregg Vanourek.

High Stakes

Charter schools in Massachusetts are a product of the state's 1993 Education Reform Act, which provided greater and more equitable funding for public schools, established demanding curriculum frameworks in core subjects, and mandated a "high stakes" assessment system to measure the performance of students, schools, and districts. Beginning with the class of 2003, every student will be required to pass the grade-10 MCAS exams to receive a high school diploma.

Seeking to stimulate innovation and provide more parental choice in public education, the Education Reform Act initially authorized the establishment of up to 25 charter schools that would enroll no more than three-quarters of 1 percent of the student population. A 1997 amendment to the legislation raised the number of charter schools to 50 and the proportion of students to 2 percent. Thirteen of these schools must be Horace Mann Schools, which are converted district schools. (The new start-up charter schools are called Commonwealth Schools.) The Horace Mann Schools have less autonomy than Commonwealth Schools, requiring the approval of the local school district and the teachers' union.

In Massachusetts, the state Board of Education may not grant charters directly to for-profit organizations. The governing board of a charter school, however, may contract with a for-profit organization to manage the school. The Boston Renaissance Charter School, for example, and the Seven Hills Charter School in Worcester are managed by the Edison Project, a private organization that operates schools for local districts and charter school boards across the country.

> "CHARTER SCHOOLS ARE AN INSTITUTIONAL INNOVATION. IT'S THE STRUCTURE OF THESE SCHOOLS AND THE GOVERNANCE OF THESE SCHOOLS THAT ARE TYPICALLY THEIR MOST INNOVATIVE FEATURE."

There are currently 34 charter schools in Massachusetts, which enroll about 10,000 students. Compared with states such as Arizona and California, Massachusetts has a small number of charter schools. Some educators say the cap on charter schools is an appropriately cautious approach to an untested innovation. Others say it is the result of political pressure from school districts and teachers' unions threatened by competition. Whatever the reason for the current cap, the result has been a relatively small number of carefully designed charter schools.

With the exception of the cap on schools, charter advocates say that the Massachusetts law is one of the strongest in the nation, providing the necessary operational, fiscal, and program authority to develop new and different schools. A corresponding and equally important strength is the state's attention to accountability. Three questions guide the accountability process, says Edward Kirby, the state's acting associate commissioner for charter schools: "Is the school's academic program a success? Is the school a viable organization? And has the school been faithful to the terms of its charter?"

Because the language in the charters is sometimes general about objectives, each school has an accountability contract with the state that has more specific commitments for students and the school. In August each school must file an annual report that provides evidence of progress toward the agreed goals. To corroborate this report, a team from the Department of Education spends a day at each school observing classes and interviewing teachers, students, and parents. In its fourth year of operation, each charter school must submit a renewal application, which is followed by an intense three- or four-day evaluation of the school and its academic program by an expert team.

The state's first 14 charters are currently being evaluated for renewal. "Massachusetts," says Bruno Manno, "has what everyone would acknowledge is one of the most thoughtful processes for developing strong accountability plans."

"MASSACHUSETTS HAS ONE OF THE MOST THOUGHTFUL PROCESSES FOR DEVELOPING STRONG ACCOUNTABILITY PLANS."

Something Different

The motivation for establishing charter schools in Massachusetts is the same as in other states. "Charters start from the inspiration of individual educators, groups of parents, community leaders, or teachers with a dream," according to a national study of charter schools sponsored by U.S. Department of Education. "They want something different for children. They gather support, overcome skeptics and political resistance if they need to — and they often do — and create a proposal that says why they want to start their charter school, what students they want to serve, and what they plan to do. Once a charter school is founded, parents and students make deeply personal decisions, exercise their choice and take a chance on enrolling in this new opportunity."

Sen. John Kerry (D-Mass.), who would like "to make every public school in this country essentially a charter school within the public school system," elaborated on the themes of choice and competition in an October 1998 speech:

> *It just makes sense that parents ought to have the freedom as consumers to choose the public schools that fit their children's needs. It makes sense that schools ought to compete for the chance to educate our children. We are not a country that believes in monopolies. We are a country that believes diversity raises quality. We wouldn't accept one source, one company, one choice in food, or clothing or one entertainment outlet. So why would we accept — or insist on — a gray dull lack of choice in public education, so that some have all the best opportunities and others are condemned without recourse to the least and the worst?*

Although diverse as a group, virtually all charter schools in Massachusetts have a single unifying mission or focus that lends coherence to the school and attracts like-minded teachers, parents, and students. City On A Hill Charter School in Boston, for example, has a strong civic focus that includes student participation in weekly town meetings. Pioneer Valley Charter School in Hadley integrates performing arts into the regular curriculum. The Lowell Middlesex Academy Charter School provides a college prep program for high school dropouts. And Community Day Charter School in Lawrence has adopted standards of the Modern Red School House, a comprehensive design for school restructuring sponsored by the New American Schools.

Most Massachusetts charter schools have broad interdisciplinary themes that infuse arts, science, and writing across the curriculum. Many of these schools work hard to establish a sense of community, with an emphasis on character, citizenship, and respect for self and others. Almost all have a schoolwide code of conduct, and some require students to wear simple uniforms.

Exempt from district regulations, many charter schools have longer days, and some have longer years than other public schools. At the Academy of the Pacific Rim Charter School, students are there from 8:00 a.m. to 4:10 p.m. — a school day that is about two hours longer than most Boston public schools. Moreover, the school year at the academy is 210 days — 30 days longer than other public schools. At a community forum on charter schools last year, Stacey Boyd, a founding director of the academy, invited the audience to do the math: "If a student stays with us from 6th grade through 12th grade, they get an additional 4 1/2 years of a Boston public school education."

Many charter schools have been entrepreneurial in establishing partnerships with cultural, recreational, health, and business organizations. For example, one of Neighborhood House Charter School's partners is the Massachusetts Eye and Ear Infirmary, which provides vision and hearing exams for students twice a year. City On A Hill Charter School has more than 80 community partners that either host students as interns or help with programs from swimming to science labs.

Massachusetts charter schools are financed by the cost per student in the child's home district, which is deducted from the district's state aid and applied to the charter school. According to the Massachusetts Department of Education, charter schools received an average of $6,500 per student for the 1998–99 school year. Massachusetts is one of a handful of states that allocates additional funding — $300 per pupil — for capital costs. Although helpful, these funds generally cover only a small fraction of a school's facility costs. The rest must be either privately raised or deducted from per-pupil operating funds.

Securing an adequate facility is perhaps the most pervasive start-up challenge faced by charter schools. Many Massachusetts charter schools lease space in former parochial schools. Others have received help from the state's economic development agency in gaining access to state or federal facilities that are no longer in use.

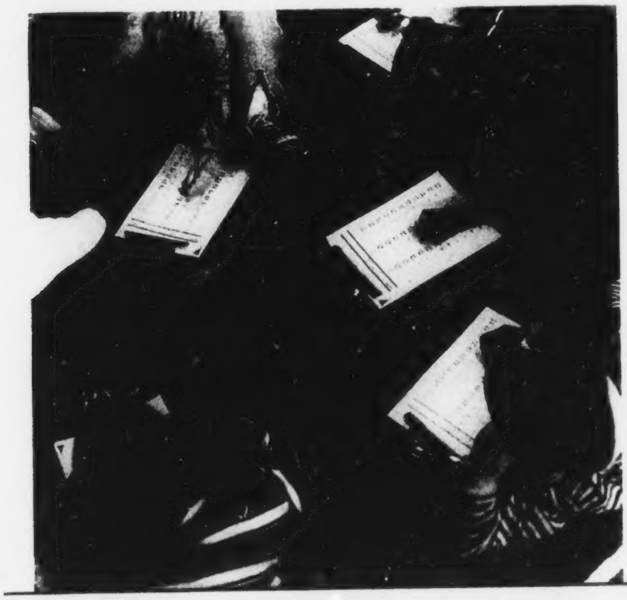
Once they are up and running, charter schools face a number of sustainability issues. These include the risk of burnout among teachers and school leaders who work long days with limited administrative support. And as with many organizations, "visionaries" who start up charter schools are not always well suited to managing day-to-day operations.

Actively Hostile

Despite their bipartisan support and growing popularity, charter schools in Massachusetts and other states face a host of critics and objections. Some educators see charter schools as a fiscal drain on an already weak system of public education. Charter-school advocates counter that the money should follow the children because they are not being educated by the district. Moreover, in Massachusetts, the state eases the fiscal burden on school districts by providing partial reimbursement for the cost of students who attend charter schools.

Another criticism of charter schools — particularly those managed by for-profit organizations — is that they do a poor job of serving special-education students. Pamela Kaufmann, director of special education in Framingham and former state director of special education in Massachusetts, says that a few years ago

"IT JUST MAKES SENSE THAT PARENTS OUGHT TO HAVE THE FREEDOM AS CONSUMERS TO CHOOSE THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS THAT FIT THEIR CHILDREN'S NEEDS."



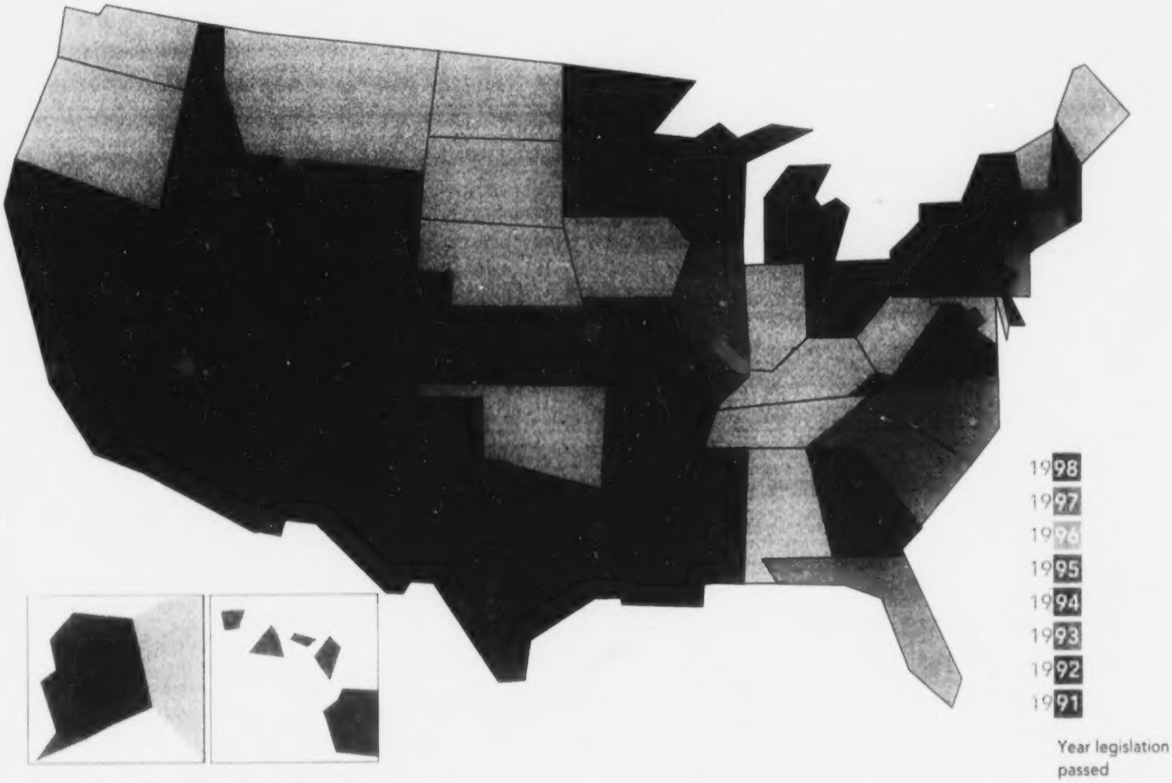
some charter schools were resistant to, and others ignorant of, their legal obligations to serve children with disabilities. More recently, however, there has been "a shift in a very positive way taking place," says Kaufmann. "Charter schools are hiring special-ed coordinators, they're hiring special-ed staff, and they are collaborating with each other on special-ed issues."

A prominent critic of charter schools in Massachusetts is the American Federation of Teachers, declaring that the state's legislation "does not meet the AFT criteria for good charter school law." Among the union's objections is that teacher certification is not required in charter schools. Charter advocates, on the other hand, note that about three-quarters of teachers in Massachusetts charter schools have been certified by the state. Moreover, hiring uncertified liberal-arts graduates has not hurt the nation's top private schools. The real issue, say charter advocates, is a school's authority to hold teachers accountable for their performance.

One largely unrealized purpose of the authorizing legislation in Massachusetts was that innovations in charter schools would be adopted by district schools. Although a study sponsored by the Massachusetts Department of Education acknowledged many innovations in charter schools, the report also found a number of barriers to their replication in district schools, including insufficient time for charter schools to document and promote new practices. Another obstacle was a lack of receptivity to charter-school innovations by district schools. "Many district superintendents are angry and resentful about loss of revenue that results from students attending the charter schools," according to the legislatively mandated study, conducted by Rosenblum Brigham Associates. "They are therefore resistant to learning anything from them. Some are actively hostile to the charter schools."

BY THE NUMBERS: CHARTER SCHOOLS NATIONWIDE

In 1991 Minnesota was the first state to pass charter-school legislation. Since then 34 other states and the District of Columbia have passed similar laws, which vary in the degree of autonomy they provide charter schools and the measures of accountability they demand from them. Today some 1,300 charter schools enroll about 300,000 students nationwide.



Basic Data: Center for Education Reform

Such attitudes may be changing, and successful outreach to district schools is possible, according to Sarah Kass, president and co-founder of City On A Hill Charter School. Her school and the Boston district's Jeremiah E. Burke High School are working together on the Urban Calculus Initiative, which is aimed at improving mathematics education in Boston and preparing all students to study calculus by the 12th grade. With funding from the U.S. Department of Education and assistance from TERC, a nonprofit R&D organization specializing in math and science education, a team of teachers and researchers are working together to develop publications and make recommendations about mathematics education.

City On A Hill Charter School, where the academic program is designed entirely by teachers, is planning further outreach to district schools through the development of a teacher-training center. Although the center is still in the planning phase, Kass envisions a training program that creates new research and learning opportunities for practicing teachers and that helps pre-service teachers learn their profession in an entrepreneurial environment. "One of the things

> "ONE OF THE THINGS WE'RE CRITICALLY INTERESTED IN IS THE ROLE CHARTER SCHOOLS CAN PLAY IN LEVERAGING WIDER CHANGE."

we're critically interested in is the role charter schools can play in leveraging wider change," says Kass.

Slippery Slope

It is unclear whether charter schools will play such a role in school reform or merely be "a side show" — good perhaps for a few hundred kids in a given school but largely irrelevant to the hundreds of thousands of students in the rest of the state and the millions of students nationwide who do not attend charter schools. Advocates in Massachusetts, however, say charter schools have already had an impact on the system, citing their catalytic effect on the establishment of Pilot Schools, nine public schools in the Boston district that have substantial autonomy and waivers from union rules.

Bruno Manno admits that the charter movement is far from being a full-scale alternative to the current system of public education. Instead, he says, charter schools are "a foreshadowing of how education in America could work." The key issue that many educators and analysts are grappling with is how to go beyond the creation of individual schools and to create systems of different schools that provide families with as many choices as possible to meet their diverse needs.

One such mechanism of choice is called "contracting," which involves a fundamentally new role for local school boards. Instead of operating schools, school boards would provide public oversight of a range of organizations and contractors that manage the activities of schools. Theodore Sizer, principal of the Francis W. Parker Charter School in Devens and a former dean of the Harvard Graduate School of Education, compares contracting to the way textbooks are selected: "School boards do not design and print texts; they decide what they want and then choose from the offerings of vendors. If after a year or two a text is found wanting, another is readily at hand to replace it."[2]

Although contract schools would not necessarily be run by for-profit organizations, such arrangements often prompt the charge that the charter-school movement is a Trojan horse hiding its real agenda — vouchers for private schools. In a recent *New York Times* opinion piece, Roger W. Bowen, president of the State University of New York at New Paltz, warned that New York's recently enacted charter legislation represented "the slippery slope toward increased privatization of education . . . a dangerous prelude to the introduction of a voucher system — one that would give parents even more choice by subsidizing study at private and religious schools."

Bruno Manno, who is a proponent of school choice but not the total privatization of public education, is unimpressed by the slippery-slope argument. To keep public schools public, he says, communities must insist on public oversight of their educational institutions and pull the plug on those that are ineffective. "Some slopes are slippery and some aren't," says Manno. "The reason that some aren't is that people make sure it doesn't happen."

[2] For a complete discussion of contracting, see *Reinventing Public Education: How Contracting Can Transform America's Schools* (University of Chicago Press) by Paul T. Hill, Lawrence C. Pierce, and James W. Guthrie.

"We expected you at six o'clock, but we're glad you're here, Councilwoman Goodman."

The mild rebuke by Austin Interfaith's Pam Farley casts a shadow over Jackie Goodman's wan face. She's 20 minutes late, Goodman says evenly, because she was in an ongoing meeting of the Austin, Tex., City Council. "But I'm here now," she concludes briskly.

One might expect her hosts at Maplewood Elementary School — 17 educators, parents, and organizers working in nine Austin schools — to cut the councilwoman some slack. Goodman has expressed interest in the after-school programs they run for hundreds of poor children and adults. She's prepared to hear stories of life-changing job skills and recreation programs run on shoestring budgets. Circling the room are proudly arranged photos of children making quilts, taking apart computers, and playing basketball. Heart warming as this meeting will be, it's a sure bet that not every council member would delay dinner for it.

But this group is not looking for table scraps. Austin Interfaith Network was created to encourage low-income citizens, and their leaders, to do for themselves and to claim resources and respect from authorities — even when that means tweaking a sympathetic guest.

The network and its parent organizations, the Southwest Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF) and the Texas Interfaith Education Fund (TIEF), say such empowerment not only is morally right, but also can lead to healthier communities, stronger schools, and greater student achievement. Throughout Texas, 118 elementary and middle schools have embraced this philosophy and become "Alliance Schools," where principals and leaders have signed declarations to transform their schools into locally responsive and accountable neighborhood centers.

In 1998 Alliance Schools enrolled 80,000 students, 95 percent of whom are Latino and African American, and 83 percent are economically disadvantaged. Since 1993 these schools have seen a collective 42 percent increase in the proportion of children passing all sections of the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS).

Parents, staff, and organizers from Alliance communities have convinced officials to give them more curricular and administrative freedom than other public schools, to remove school-dwelling rats, to install stoplights at busy school intersections, and to start funding the after-school programs that caught Councilwoman Goodman's attention. Perhaps most importantly, Alliance Schools have made activists of parents like Ofelia Zapata, who once thought "politics were on TV, not in our own city." Much less in the schools.

An Education in Politics

In 1990 Zapata — a shy, 30-year-old widow with three young daughters — spent little time in Austin's Sanchez Elementary School. Although she had not shown any particular leadership interests or ties to other parents, she was among the few who came inside the school. The principal spotted her and asked if she would be willing to become the PTA president. Zapata could not imagine refusing the request, although she was also busy with her secretarial job at the state commission on alcohol and drug abuse. She had been raised to accept the wishes of authority without complaint. "It's my culture," she says.

While running bake sales and other small school fund-raisers, Zapata heard about an Austin Interfaith meeting on school funding through her church. The organization, she learned, had ideas well beyond bake sales. Working from a new IAF/TIEF position paper on "communities of learners" — the conceptual blueprint for what would become Alliance Schools — organizers saw funding as one of several issues limit-

ALLIANCE SCHOOL

ing poor schools. By building bonds among families, schools, and other community "stakeholders," by sharing information, and by increasing autonomous decision making and flexibility, the group proposed to do no less than transform neighborhoods and reform public education in Texas.

Under this model, students and their families would exercise real problem-solving skills, make partnerships to improve schools and their surroundings, and have reason to respect education. In the long run, Alliance School students should be better able to compete for 21st-century jobs.

"STUDY AFTER STUDY HAS SHOWN THAT EXPECTATIONS — OF TEACHERS, PARENTS, AND STUDENTS — ARE A KEY FACTOR IN SCHOOL PERFORMANCE."

That vision was a collaborative statement, but it echoed many themes championed since the 1940s by "radical organizer Saul Alinsky" — the adjective-noun pairing so common it could be his given name. Alinsky had trained IAF's Southwest leader Ernesto Cortes — now a peripatetic organizer and recipient of a MacArthur Foundation "genius" award. Cortes advocates for "culture change" in schools and other struggling institutions. Study after study has shown that expectations — of teachers, parents, and students — are a key factor in school performance, he says: "We're trying to change those expectations."

Ofelia Zapata certainly did not find what she expected at the first Austin Interfaith meeting. She was shocked by an announcement that Sanchez Elementary and other Title I schools serving impoverished children were about to lose $300,000 in annual funding. The money had been part of a five-year grant settling a desegregation lawsuit, and the time was up. Officials had seen no compelling reason to create a funding replacement as the grant ran out.

Representing a school where roughly 90 percent of the families live below the poverty line, Zapata felt duped. With so much money at stake, "Here I was working my tail off on bake sales," she says.

She also discovered that her school, and her child, had dismal TAAS results. Her 3rd-grade daughter was on the honor roll, but when organizers taught Zapata how to decipher the TAAS reports, she discovered that the girl had not met statewide competency standards.

"I thought my child was learning," she says.

"The organizers asked me what did I think," she recalls. "No one had ever asked me. I'm just a parent — what can I do?" It was then, she says, that she learned Alinsky's "Iron Rule: Never do for others what they can do for themselves." Experienced community organizers would give her tools and training, but if the issues were important to her, she would have to take charge.

Austin Interfaith's Joe Higgs encouraged Zapata to call a parent meeting at Sanchez, an idea that terrified her. She "cried a lot" at the prospect of speaking in front of others, but Higgs, now working in Houston's IAF organization, spent hours practicing with her. Zapata found she could assign other PTA volunteers to telephone parents to convince them to attend their first PTA meeting. The process worked: 100 people showed up to learn about the funding cut and TAAS results.

"SCHOOLS DON'T KNOW ANYTHING ABOUT COMMUNITY ORGANIZING. IT TERRIFIES THEM. IT SOUNDS BOLSHEVIK."

When parents understood that their children were behind on TAAS, they were angry and energized. So was Zapata. She attended more Austin Interfaith meetings and made 15 presentations to parents at other schools whose troubles mirrored Sanchez's. What she was learning about area schools caused her to rethink her automatic obeisance to authority, in all aspects of her life. "I was supposed to be a voice for other parents," she recalls. "I started asking questions."

Having the right to ask hard questions is one of the hallmarks of Alliance organizing. At monthly meetings, Alliance principals can even challenge each other on school operations. But members say there's a network of support as well, and that network extends beyond the Alliance membership in tangible ways.

In fact, some state money won by IAF and TIEF benefits non-Alliance schools. Only about half of the current $8 million discretionary school fund was competitively awarded to Alliance Schools. The group is lobbying for $25 million from the budget cycle that begins next year.

"You have to admire that," says Kathleen Burke, who oversees disbursement of the fund and other special projects for the Texas Education Agency. "They're not just getting [money] for themselves and their organization — it really is kind of refreshing."

"A lot of what we fight for is available for other schools as well," notes Austin Interfaith organizer Gene Corbin. So the lure may not be whether Alliance can help schools get more money or even raise TAAS scores and other achievement measures. "The question is whether you really want to change your [school's] culture," Corbin says.

Community Organizing

There is no shortage of models or piecemeal programs for improving public schools; organized proponents of community-school partnerships have been at work for most of this century. But economists Richard J. Murnane and Frank Levy, who studied Alliance Schools and other programs for their book, *Teaching the New Basic Skills*, say that message takes on increased urgency as the nation moves to an information-based economy. Educating children for the sake of test scores will not develop essential thinking skills. And parents have an essential role in creating change.

"It works from the parents up," says Frank Levy of MIT. "The idea that you can [improve education] without educating the parents is a crazy idea."

"In districts serving affluent kids, kids come to school with quite high expectations for themselves, and schools are pushed to do the things they ought to do," says Harvard's Richard Murnane. "When families are poor, there is much less pressure to do the right thing. There is enormous pressure to do the wrong thing."

How to challenge ineffective school systems? Experts say it is hard for parents to even know how schools have changed since they were students, much less understand demands of the future workplace. That's where organizing comes in. But according to Anne Henderson, co-editor of *A New Generation of Evidence: The Family is Critical to Student Achievement*, "Schools don't know anything about community organizing. It terrifies them. It sounds Bolshevik."

Politics emerge, but purposefully, says Frank Levy: "'Political' means there is agitation going on. If you don't want people upset or agitated, then one model is to go back . . . to where parents aren't involved and everything is tranquil . . . and isn't it too bad that kids don't know anything."

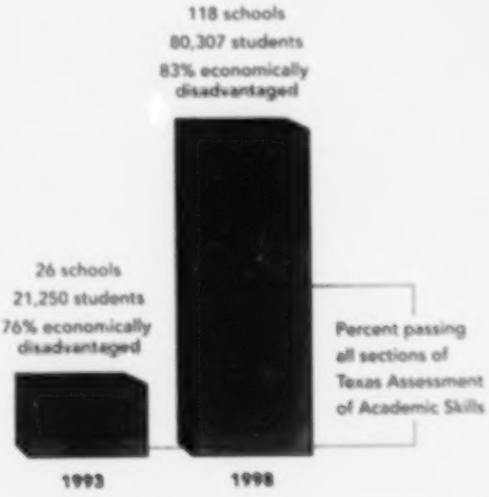
"What we're trying to do creates a tension between the world as it is and the world as it should be," says Ernie Cortes. "I don't know of any institution that's trying to reform that doesn't have a tension between those two ideas."

Alliance School leaders have learned that you cannot build relationships until you have taken the time to ask what issues parents are concerned about. These leaders work with local faith communities "because there has to be an institutional connection outside of school," Cortes says.

Teachers and parent leaders also make "neighborhood walks" — at-home visits to hear parents' basic opinions about the local school, such as what they like and what could be improved. Educators seem to agree that this process is an eye-opener. As middle-class professionals, they often believe the false stereotype, notes Zapata, "that [poor] parents don't care." What they often find is simply a difference in priorities.

At Pecan Springs Elementary, the priority was rats. Virginia Caudle, now in her second year as principal, hoped parents would work on TAAS issues, but the neighborhood visits showed that the presence of rats in the school were parents' top concern. Parents were invited to discuss the problem at a potluck meeting. Caudle told the group: "We have a problem, and we need your help." With guidance from an Austin

BY THE NUMBERS:
ALLIANCE SCHOOLS



Source: Texas Interfaith Education Fund

Interfaith organizer, parents were given a basic road map for fighting bureaucrats who had long ignored the rat problem.

Their first two meetings went nowhere, with district representatives trying to "intimidate" the group with charts and slides, Caudle says. Then a parent suggested that the group might bring a dead rat to a school board meeting. Repair trucks showed up within days.

"This was my first test as an administrator," Caudle admits. "When you come in, you're supposed to have all the answers." Giving parents control was "a risk. Some veteran teachers waited for this to fall on its face. I'm not saying they are all proponents [of Alliance concepts], but they see the value of giving our parents power."

Ernie Cortes knows that risk firsthand, and organizers speak openly about the challenges of practicing what they preach. Still, he says, "We try to show the difference between power and authority. You can maintain authority and share power."

Pecan Springs's parents, staff, and local churches have since worked to cut drug sales outside a nearby convenience store. They created TAAS tutorial classes and reversed school-board plans to cut $60,000 from the school's budget. Austin Interfaith organizer Minerva Camarena observes, "[Parents are] not begging. This is their right, to expect the best for their children."

Zapata, still a key volunteer for Austin Interfaith, said whatever communities are working on, the Iron Rule of accountability applies: "We're not a service organization. We lay out at the beginning why we're doing this. If we're going to fight for [program money and resources], this is what you're going to have to do."

A grantee of the Annie E. Casey Foundation since 1996, the Texas Interfaith Education Fund recently received a three-year $975,000 grant for school-reform efforts in Austin, San Antonio, and El Paso. Alliance Schools are being formed or newly operating in three states, and organizers in Baltimore, Md., and Portland, Ore., are looking to adapt the model as well.

Richard Murnane notes that Alliance Schools face "an enormous challenge" in educational environments where multiple-choice tests are shorthand for a school's — and a student's — worth. Alliance culture must survive the departures of a dedicated principal or parent leader, and it must spread beyond elementary-level education, where it is currently concentrated.

But there are small victories. Ofelia Zapata, who remains an active volunteer although she is now legally blind, says her children have learned to appreciate what an active citizenry can do. Over the years, she has attended hundreds of meetings but had no extra money for child care. So her youngest daughter often stayed at a local library under the care of librarian Oralia Cortes, Ernie's wife. When Cortes joked that the library might close the branch, Zapata's daughter was not concerned: "My mother won't let that happen."

> "WE TRY TO SHOW THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN POWER AND AUTHORITY. YOU CAN MAINTAIN AUTHORITY AND SHARE POWER."

COMPLETING SCHOOL AND SUCCEEDING ACADEMICALLY INCREASE CHILDREN'S ABILITY TO ESCAPE POVERTY, FORM STRONG FAMILIES, AND RAISE SUCCESSFUL KIDS OF THEIR OWN.

OF ALL THE COMMUNITY INSTITUTIONS that help children become capable adults, perhaps none is more important than school. Research shows that completing school and succeeding academically increase children's ability to escape poverty, form strong families, and raise successful kids of their own. Indeed, a good education is one of the strongest ways to break the cycle of intergenerational poverty.[1]

The Annie E. Casey Foundation funds a range of education-reform activities to help make good schools the rule rather than the exception in low-income communities. In Kentucky, for example, a number of organizations have received grants to assist the state's ambitious effort to restructure its entire system of public education. At the city level, the Foundation has provided support for Children Achieving, the comprehensive education-reform initiative in Philadelphia.

The Casey Foundation's support for the Alliance Schools in Texas is part of a larger commitment to promote parent and community involvement in education. The National Urban League, for example, has received funding to mobilize communities to help improve academic achievement among African-American students. To strengthen connections between schools and community-based youth organizations, the Foundation has provided support to the New York City Beacons. These exemplary school-based community centers, which are open in the evening and on weekends, provide social services and educational, vocational, and recreational activities for children, teens, and adults.

The Casey Foundation has also funded efforts to help teachers, parents, and other community stakeholders stimulate and sustain educational innovation. The Institute for the Transformation of Learning at Marquette University has received support to provide technical assistance in curriculum, professional development, and other areas to choice and charter schools serving disadvantaged students in Milwaukee. Drexel University's Technical Assistance Center for Public Charter Schools has been awarded funds for similar assistance to charter schools in Pennsylvania and New Jersey.

Finally, the Casey Foundation funds several dissemination and networking initiatives that share school-reform lessons, improve educational practice, and support systemwide change. The Cross City Campaign for Urban School Reform, for example, has enabled education and community leaders in six cities to exchange ideas about improving schools. And the Council of Chief State School Officers has promoted joint efforts between departments of education and other state agencies to improve education for disadvantaged children.

[1] For a complete discussion of creating successful schools in low-income communities, see the "Overview" section of the 1997 *KIDS COUNT Data Book*.

A TALE OF TWO CITIES

Nothing works, it was said again and again over the last three decades as the nation spent billions of dollars on flawed job-training programs that produced more frustration than employment. Employers said it, job trainees said it, social workers said it, policymakers said it. Somehow, a nation that sends astronauts into orbit has not found a way to send disadvantaged young men and women to employers, even when desperately short-handed.

In the early 1990s, "jobs" was something of a four-letter word at the Annie E. Casey Foundation, for no matter what efforts were made to help impoverished children, the chronic lack of decent jobs for their parents undermined most efforts and contributed to every social problem in the book. Foundation-sponsored research subsequently revealed that many small programs around the country were successfully matching low-skill workers with decent jobs. So it could be done. But could it be done in many more ways — and on a scale that would make a difference for the 7 million American children growing up in a few hundred islands of concentrated poverty?

Seeking answers, Casey launched in 1995 the Jobs Initiative, an eight-year, $30-million effort to promote reform in the job market of poor neighborhoods in Denver, Milwaukee, New Orleans, Philadelphia, St. Louis, and Seattle. The programs have gone through a planning stage and are now about halfway through a development stage; not until after 2000 are the sites expected to be fully operational as model job projects, using their experience to promote public-policy reforms.

It's years too soon, then, to pass judgment on the initiative, but it is on a promising course, says Robert P. Giloth, senior associate at the Foundation and manager of the initiative. "We've got at least 30 kinds of job-training projects, and we're getting something of everything we wanted," he says. "We're learning, and we're also getting results, with employers buying into it and a couple thousand people getting placed in jobs. We're hitting wage targets and getting some retention."

To get a sense of the initiative's progress, start with some of the old bureaucratic mistakes that gave job training a bad name in two cities, Milwaukee and St. Louis, and then consider one innovative job program in each site.

Milwaukee

Defying common sense, most publicly funded job programs rarely coordinated training programs with employers — so trainees learned skills that weren't marketable, and employers couldn't find applicants with the right skills. Job-training programs also focused narrowly on placing workers in jobs — any jobs — with no concern for helping people find and keep decent-paying jobs with a future.

In Milwaukee, the Jobs Initiative starts with good employers in the area's growing industries and then seeks good workers in the inner city. It's a matching game, with very high stakes. For example, at the same time jobless rates soared over 20 percent in some poor Milwaukee neighborhoods, a chronic shortage of skilled machinists was forcing one in three manufacturers to shelve expansion plans, according to a 1997 survey of 400 companies by the Wisconsin Regional Training Partnership, a consortium of labor leaders and manufacturers. The organization participates in the Casey initiative by building partnerships among private, public, and nonprofit entities to match the needs of workers and communities with the needs of employers. The consortium recruits jobless workers through community organizations, obtains public funds for training programs, and coordinates training programs and social services, ranging from child care to transportation.

By Michael deCourcy Hinds

> "WE'RE LEARNING, AND WE'RE ALSO GETTING RESULTS, WITH EMPLOYERS BUYING INTO IT AND A COUPLE THOUSAND PEOPLE GETTING PLACED IN JOBS. WE'RE HITTING WAGE TARGETS AND GETTING SOME RETENTION."

The Manufacturing Jobs Connection, as this program is called, starts with an employer like Tecumseh Products. Tecumseh, which makes small motors in a suburban factory 20 miles outside of Milwaukee, joined the initiative because it couldn't find enough suburban workers — despite offering good benefits, a supportive work environment, and wages up to $19 an hour. The company collaborated with a vocational school, the Milwaukee Area Technical College, in designing a training program tailored to its specific job openings. Inner-city community groups bring promising applicants to Tecumseh for tours and interviews with managers, who select trainees for a four-week training session.

During the program, taught by community college instructors at the factory, trainees put in eight-hour days as they learn to read blueprints, use machine tools, and speak the language of a machine shop. They also learn about supervisor's expectations for such things as production quotas and handling job-related problems. Graduates start work the day after training ends. Mentors, now including graduates of the program, help newcomers break into new jobs.

The Jobs Initiative is changing attitudes as well as employment practices, says David Eberhardt, operations manager at Tecumseh. "Two years ago, when folks told me we would be hiring welfare people, I thought, 'Why bother? They will show up for a couple days and leave,'" he says. "I have to be quick to add that that attitude shifted quite quickly. After a few months I saw these workers were quality workers, coming to work, working hard, meeting productivity and quality standards. We've been introduced to a quality work force, and regardless of where the economy goes, we will continue to hire these quality workers."

Tecumseh has hired 20 graduate trainees and in January 1999 was gearing up a program to hire 18 more, at a public cost of $1,704 per worker. The program has also planted a fertile grapevine in the inner city: Program graduates helped Tecumseh recruit their friends and relatives, increasing the company's number of minority employees from 0 to 52, or 12 percent of its work force, in just two years.

Low-income workers were also skeptical of publicly funded job-training programs. Bernard Redmond, 35, was unemployed for a year and was not optimistic, he

"WE TELL CLIENTS, 'SUCCESS ISN'T JUST GRADUATING FROM THE PROGRAM, IT'S ALSO GETTING INVOLVED IN YOUR CHURCH, YOUR CHILDREN'S SCHOOL, THE NEIGHBORHOOD CRIME WATCH.' "

says, about a training program for machinists offered at Tecumseh in the summer of 1998. But as it became clear that the program had a lot to offer, his spirits lifted. "I like my job," he says. "You don't get many chances like this one."

After seven months, Redmond was earning $11 an hour — more than he ever had before — and looking forward to regular pay increases and training opportunities that could increase his skills and nearly double his wages. The company also provides subsidized transportation, health insurance, and an employee assistance program that helps workers cope with family and personal problems — like Redmond's alcohol abuse. "I was having problems getting to work after the weekend, and Tecumseh set me up with a mental-health counselor," Redmond says. "The counseling is helping me all around, at home and on the job. Now I'm spending more time on weekends with my daughter Sheena, and I'm sober with her."

Initial employment numbers for the Manufacturing Jobs Connection look good, says Rhandi Berth, the consortium's executive director. In its first year, the program, which is coordinated by just two staff members, exceeded its goals by placing 112 workers in jobs earning $10.44 an hour, on average. Next year, the goal is to place 200 workers and to streamline the program that moves at a frustratingly slow pace. "We could have placed 800 workers instead of 112 if our system could have responded," says Berth. "It takes time to recruit workers, it takes time to get them certified for public funding, it takes time to get the money, it takes time to set up training programs — everything takes too much time."

The consortium, in other words, has found pieces to one employment puzzle and is now trying to speed up assembly. Looking ahead, Berth remains optimistic: "We keep saying that if we do our job right, they won't need us in five years."

St. Louis

Public job programs taught work skills, but rarely explained the unspoken rules of the workplace, including such things as employers' expectations about calling in when sick, punctuality, productivity, obedience, and appropriate behavior in handling job-related stresses. As a result, these programs sent inexperienced workers — many with no personal or family work history — into workplaces mined for failure. In turn, these failures were blamed only on the workers and rarely on the programs, which were usually designed by people unfamiliar with the circumstances of poverty.

In St. Louis, the Regional Jobs Initiative focuses on the hardest work force challenge: helping chronically unemployed residents and recipients of public assistance make the transition to work. Work Link, one of the initiative's programs, addresses many transitional issues, including low self-esteem, little work experience, and inadequate transportation. The program connects workers with jobs in areas served by MetroLink, an 18-mile light-rail line that opened in 1992 and connects East St. Louis with Lambert–St.

Louis International Airport. Jobless rates in adjacent neighborhoods — where 40 percent of the children live in poverty — range up to seven times the rate for the metropolitan area, which hovered around 4 percent in 1998.

The St. Louis Community College oversees the Work Link program, which is primarily carried out by Better Family Life, a 15-year-old community organization. The organization recruits, trains, and places workers in entry-level jobs. It also provides supportive services to workers for up to two years and encourages them to continue their education at the community college, which offers high school and college programs for entering many careers. A novel aspect of the program is its emphasis on connecting people with communities as well as jobs, says Carolyn D. Seward, program director: "We tell clients, 'Success isn't just graduating from the program, it's also getting involved in your church, your children's school, the neighborhood crime watch. If you're living in the inner city, you're part of the solution or part of the problem.'"

Better Family Life's four-week training program focuses on what Seward calls "soft skills." The course includes practice preparing resumes, handling job interviews, dressing for work, and coping with conflicts on the job. The program also provides workshops and individual counseling on such issues as substance abuse, child care, homelessness, and criminal records. "I often say to clients, 'If you decide you want to turn your life around, we are here to help you,'" says Seward. "But when someone tries to say all sorts of 'I don'ts' and 'I can'ts,' we say, 'That is an old song. No more excuses.'"

IN ST. LOUIS, THE REGIONAL JOBS INITIATIVE FOCUSES ON THE HARDEST WORK FORCE CHALLENGE: HELPING CHRONICALLY UNEMPLOYED RESIDENTS AND RECIPIENTS OF PUBLIC ASSISTANCE MAKE THE TRANSITION TO WORK.

Since September 1998 the program has placed more than 100 workers in jobs, typically paying $6 or $7 an hour. Seward said low wages for entry-level jobs make the welfare-to-work transition painfully difficult for families. "Can the Work Link model work with minimum wages?" she asks. "I don't know. The verdict is out."

Work Link receives good reviews. "Whatever they are doing at Better Family Life, they should pass it on" to other job-training programs, says Del Baird, human resources manager of Paradies Concessions Arch II Corp., which owns retail shops at the airport. Baird says graduates from other welfare-to-work programs were not nearly as well prepared as those from Better Family Life. She hired nine recent graduates and wants to hire 10 or 15 more immediately. Entry-level workers in warehouse and sales usually start at around $6.50 an hour, plus benefits.

Willetta Croft, 32, graduated from the program in November and started work as a sales associate in one of Paradies' gift shops at the airport. "The trainers take time to find out what's going on with you and what areas they can help you with," says Croft, a single mother with six small children who continues to receive some public assistance. She says the program provided helpful counseling and good ideas for dealing with supervisors. Croft also says the program

MOST PUBLICLY FUNDED JOB PROGRAMS RARELY COORDINATED TRAINING PROGRAMS WITH EMPLOYERS — SO TRAINEES LEARNED SKILLS THAT WEREN'T MARKETABLE, AND EMPLOYERS COULDN'T FIND APPLICANTS WITH THE RIGHT SKILLS.

had lifted her spirits, inspiring her to bring hams to homeless families, to attend church again, and to consider ways she might help steer young people in the neighborhood away from violence. "My family says they notice a change in me," says Croft. When she catches her breath, she says she plans to take courses at St. Louis Community College.

Against an old backdrop of failure in St. Louis job-training programs, Work Link is off to a good start, says Jack Quigley, senior project associate in the Community Development Division of the St. Louis Community College. The program has a lot going for it, he says, but two elements stand out:

First, Better Family Life knows its African-American clientele. "It's an organization with a very progressive, sharp staff of black people who know how to relate to black folks who are unemployed, and know how to inspire and motivate them," says Quigley. "This is where ... many majority-dominated institutions often fail, in understanding the African-American culture and the culture of just plain poverty."

Second, Work Link — like many other programs in the Jobs Initiative — is set up on a business model, called outcome-based funding, that encourages creativity and accountability. Essentially, the St. Louis Regional Jobs Initiative agreed to pay $500,000 for training and placing 200 workers in jobs that last at least a year. Better Family Life, then, receives full pay — $2,500 per trainee — only for those who are still working after a year. Portions of the $2,500 are paid at five milestones: after the first week of training, placement in a job, and then after four months, seven months, and 12 months on the job. "We don't get paid unless we produce the product," says Quigley. "It's a whole new way of doing this kind of thing."

Michael deCourcy Hinds, a former reporter for the New York Times, *is a vice president at the Public Agenda Foundation.*

RESEARCH AND EVALUATION NOTES

RECENT EVALUATIONS OF INITIATIVES THAT IMPROVE CHILD AND FAMILY OUTCOMES, REFORM INSTITUTIONS, AND STRENGTHEN COMMUNITIES

EVALUATION OF FAMILY TO FAMILY, RESEARCH TRIANGLE INSTITUTE AND THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK.

Overwhelmed by increasing numbers of children at risk of maltreatment and in out-of-home care, child-welfare systems nationwide face a continuing crisis. Data indicate that fewer children in care are able to return home safely or find permanent homes, the number of foster families has declined in most places, and more children are inappropriately placed in institutions.

Responding to the national crisis in foster care, the Annie E. Casey Foundation launched, in 1992, Family to Family: Reconstructing Foster Care, a multiyear, multisite initiative with the following goals: to develop networks of family foster care homes in neighborhoods where children placed in state care live, to reunify children with their families as soon as that can be done safely, to avoid unnecessary placements whenever preserving the family through intensive support is a responsible option, and to place those children who are unable to return home safely into permanent and stable settings as soon as possible.

The evaluation by the Research Triangle Institute and the University of North Carolina found that Family to Family has been most successful in sites that focused on "the most vulnerable neighborhoods of large urban areas." Another significant benefit, according to the evaluators, was the enhanced capacity of Family to Family sites to produce, analyze, and interpret child-welfare data.

The Family to Family evaluation is available online at www.unc.edu/~lynnu/f2fintro.htm. For further information about the evaluation, contact its principal investigator, Charles L. Usher, at the School of Social Work, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, NC 27599-3550. E-mail: lynn_usher@unc.edu. Additional information about the Family to Family initiative is available from the Annie E. Casey Foundation, 701 St. Paul Street, Baltimore, MD 21202.

THE LOS ANGELES JOBS-FIRST GAIN EVALUATION: PRELIMINARY FINDINGS ON PARTICIPATION AND FIRST-YEAR IMPACTS, MANPOWER DEMONSTRATION RESEARCH CORPORATION (MDRC).

In the nation's largest cities, welfare-to-work programs have generally been unsuccessful in moving large numbers of welfare recipients to employment and self-sufficiency. In the mid-1990s Los Angeles County, which has the largest welfare population of any county in the country, modified its welfare-to-work program by emphasizing rapid placement into jobs rather than remedial education.

Called Jobs-First GAIN, the revamped county program provided high-quality assistance to welfare recipients searching for jobs. Seeking to demonstrate that work pays, case managers for Jobs-First GAIN emphasized to enrollees that California's welfare rules allowed many recipients to combine earnings and welfare in the short run. Under these rules, welfare recipients would be financially better off by working rather than remaining on welfare.

The preliminary findings from MDRC's evaluation of Jobs-First GAIN indicate that the program has produced substantial increases in participants' employment and earnings, while cutting welfare and Food Stamps costs. MDRC calls the gains "among the largest ever found in studies of full-scale welfare-to-work programs in the nation's biggest cities."

Funded by Los Angeles County, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, and the Ford Foundation, the evaluation of Jobs-First GAIN is available online at www.mdrc.org. For additional information, contact Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation, 16 East 34 Street, New York, NY 10016.

JUVENILE DETENTION ALTERNATIVES INITIATIVE: AN INTERIM SUMMARY EVALUATION REPORT, NATIONAL COUNCIL ON CRIME AND DELINQUENCY.

In principle, the purposes of secure juvenile detention are clear: to ensure that young people charged with delinquent acts appear in court, and to minimize the likelihood of their reoffending prior to disposition. In fact, secure facilities increasingly hold youth for reasons unrelated to detention's authorized purposes. These reasons include admission policies that do not distinguish between young people who pose public-safety risks and those who do not, an absence of alternatives to either locked confinement or outright release, and inefficient case processing by the juvenile-justice system.

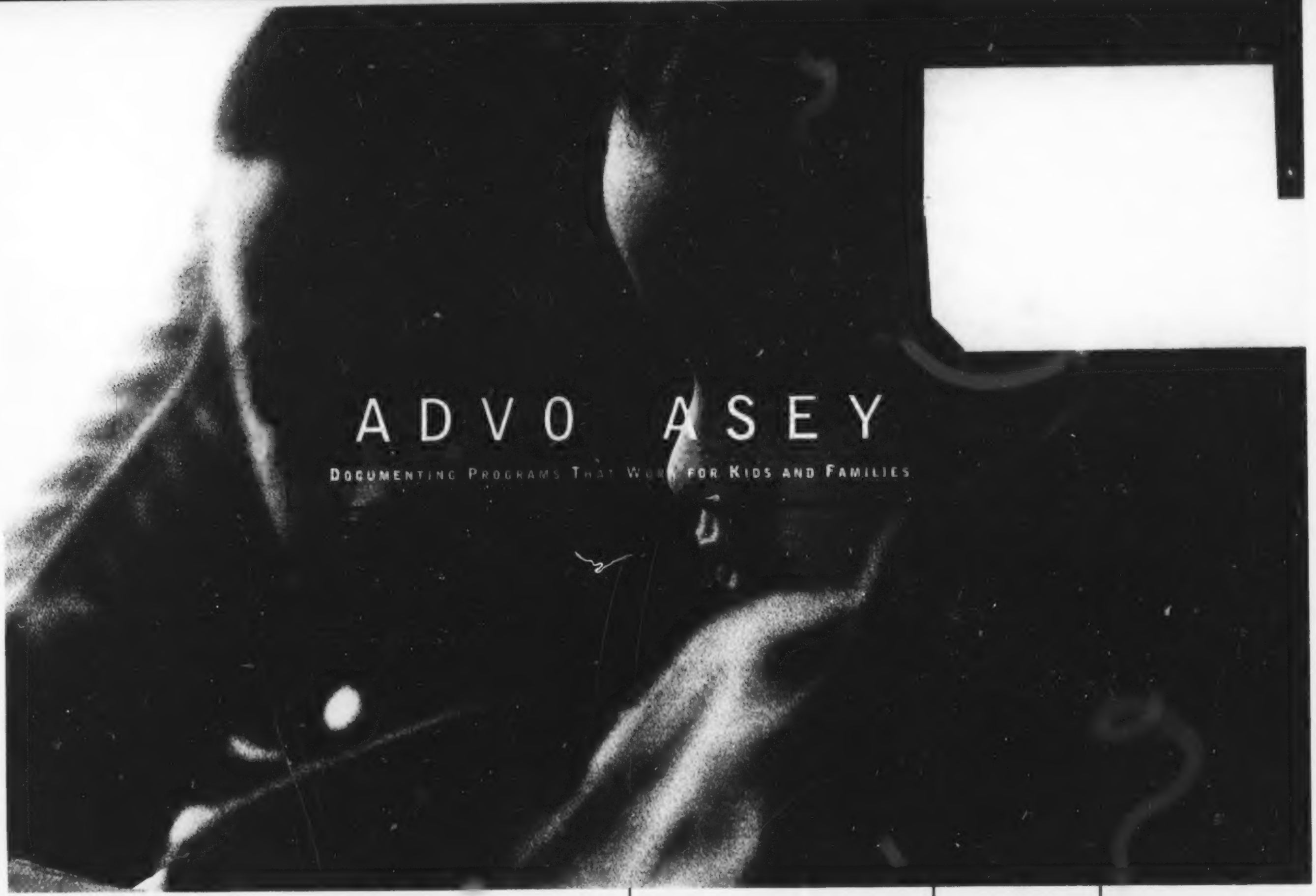
To demonstrate that jurisdictions can establish more effective and efficient systems to accomplish the purposes of juvenile detention, the Casey Foundation established, in 1992, the Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative (JDAI). Five sites — Cook County, Ill.; Milwaukee County, Wisc.; Multnomah County, Ore.; New York City; and Sacramento County, Calif. — received grants to reduce the number of young people inappropriately incarcerated, to minimize the number of youth who fail to appear in court or commit delinquent acts, to redirect public funds toward effective alternatives, and to improve conditions of confinement.

The interim evaluation of JDAI by NCCD reported several significant achievements across the demonstration sites, including a 7.5 percent decrease in admissions to secure facilities and 700 new alternative program slots that served 12,000 young people. NCCD's final evaluation of the initiative will be available in late 1999. A copy of *Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative: An Interim Summary Evaluation Report* is available without charge from the National Council on Crime and Delinquency, 685 Market Street, Suite 620, San Francisco, CA 94105. For additional information about the Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative, contact the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

The Annie E. Casey Foundation
701 St. Paul Street
Baltimore, Maryland 21202
Phone: 410.547.6600
Fax: 410.547.6624
www.aecf.org

Art Direction/Design: Kathryn Shagas
Design Associate: Janice Bonner
Map Art: Joanne Cooper
Illustrations: David Suter

Photography:
Terry Vine / Tony Stone (cover)
Mark Asnin / Saba (pp. 18–23)
Susie Fitzhugh (pp. 33–36)



ADVOCASEY

Documenting Programs That Work for Kids and Families

A Publication of the Annie E. Casey Foundation | Fall 1999/Winter 2000 | Volume One | Number Three

PAGE 2:

REFORMING CHILD WELFARE

MORE FOSTER FAMILIES, FEWER CHILDREN ENTERING CARE

REBUILDING FAMILY FOSTER CARE IN CUYAHOGA AND ANNE ARUNDEL COUNTIES

THE GRADUATES

THE CASEY FAMILY SERVICES ALUMNI STUDY

"QUITTING A BEEF"

A VIOLENCE-FREE ZONE IN WASHINGTON, D.C.

JUVENILE JAILHOUSE ROCKED

REFORMING DETENTION IN CHICAGO, PORTLAND, AND SACRAMENTO

PAGE 2: REFORMING CHILD WELFARE

By Douglas W. Nelson

There is perhaps no more difficult social enterprise than making wise decisions about helping children who have been abused and neglected. At a minimum, child welfare professionals are responsible for removing kids from harm's way, deciding when they can return home safely, and, if that is not possible, placing them in a permanent new family. While making these life-altering decisions, child welfare systems must provide kids who have been traumatized — both by family crisis and by removal from their homes — with safe and stable foster care. Moreover, federal legislation, good practice, and the best interests of children demand that all of these steps be taken with all deliberate speed.

Not surprisingly, child welfare agencies sometimes make bad decisions — an admission that does not excuse negligence or incompetence, but does acknowledge such daunting challenges as assessing the strengths and limitations of families, the potential of individuals and families to change (for better or for worse), and the nature of individual parent-child relations. Data to inform these assessments are invariably incomplete, and social workers — often insufficiently trained or rewarded for their responsibilities — operate in an environment of vast demand for services, finite public resources, and limited communication with other public and private agencies serving vulnerable children and families.

Despite the inherent difficulty of child welfare work, there is a growing body of evidence that we can do a better job of protecting kids, strengthening their families, and expeditiously moving children toward permanence — generally reunification or adoption. In the Spring 1999 issue of ADVOCASEY, for example, we featured a story on Iowa's statewide effort to devolve child welfare resources, decision-making authority, and accountability to the community level. The results of this "Decategorization" project included the local development of innovative prevention and treatment services, which in turn led to improved outcomes for children and families.

The current issue of ADVOCASEY begins with a report on two sites that participated in Family to Family, a Casey Foundation initiative to reform child welfare systems. In Cleveland, Family to Family made remarkable progress in recruiting foster parents in the neighborhoods where at-risk children live. A key feature of the initiative is that foster families are trained to become a resource for and a partner with birth parents — working to assure that birth families remain constructively connected with their kids and, where possible, are prepared for a safe reunification.

CHILD WELFARE AGENCIES WILL NEVER ACHIEVE THEIR GOALS AS LONG AS THEY SEEK TO DO SO ALONE — AS AN INDEPENDENT SYSTEM ISOLATED FROM GENUINE PARTNERSHIPS WITH FAMILIES, KIN, NEIGHBORHOODS, PRIVATE AGENCIES, AND OTHER HUMAN SERVICE SYSTEMS.

The Family to Family effort in Anne Arundel County, Maryland, achieved dramatic results at the front end of the child welfare system through sharp reductions in the number of children placed in care. By providing flexible and responsive in-home treatment and support services. Family to Family has sought to provide fragile families with the services they need most, when they need them most.

For the relatively small number of children who have little likelihood of reunification or adoption — generally older kids who often require intensive services — long-term family foster care is frequently the best option. Unlike most large philanthropies, the Annie E. Casey Foundation has a direct-service arm, called Casey Family Services, that provides such care and other child welfare services. This issue's report on a recent follow-up study of young people served by Casey's foster care program documents the importance of stability, continuity of care, and individualized support in assisting young people in the transition from adolescent custody to independent young adulthood.

Perhaps the most durable theme to emerge from these stories and the Casey Foundation's longstanding efforts to improve public systems serving disadvantaged children and families is this: Child welfare agencies will never achieve their goals as long as they seek to do so alone — as an independent system isolated from genuine partnerships with families, kin, neighborhoods, private agencies, and other human service systems. Although this new way of doing business has not been successful everywhere, nor wholly successful anywhere, many communities and states taking this difficult path have made enormous strides.

Douglas W. Nelson is the president of the Annie E. Casey Foundation and head of New York City's Special Child Welfare Advisory Panel.

C

DOCUMENTING PROGRAMS THAT WORK FOR KIDS AND FAMILIES

TABLE OF CONTENTS

VOLUME ONE | NUMBER THREE | FALL 1999/WINTER 2000

MORE FOSTER FAMILIES, FEWER CHILDREN ENTERING CARE 4
REBUILDING FAMILY FOSTER CARE IN CUYAHOGA AND ANNE ARUNDEL COUNTIES

THE GRADUATES 12
THE CASEY FAMILY SERVICES ALUMNI STUDY

"QUITTING A BEEF" 16
A VIOLENCE-FREE ZONE IN WASHINGTON, D.C.

JUVENILE JAILHOUSE ROCKED 21
REFORMING DETENTION IN CHICAGO, PORTLAND, AND SACRAMENTO

ADVOCASEY *is published by the Annie E. Casey Foundation's Office of External Affairs. Material may be reprinted with appropriate acknowledgment. Articles are also available online at www.aecf.org.*

The Annie E. Casey Foundation ***is a private charitable organization dedicated to helping build better futures for disadvantaged children in the United States. The primary mission of the Foundation is to foster public policies, human-service reforms, and community supports that more effectively meet the needs of today's vulnerable children and families. In pursuit of this goal, the Foundation makes grants that help states, cities, and neighborhoods fashion more innovative, cost-effective responses to these needs.***

The Annie E. Casey Foundation ***was established in 1948 by Jim Casey, one of the founders of United Parcel Service, and his siblings, who named the Foundation in honor of their mother.***

MORE FOSTER FAMILIES, FEWER CHILDRE

By Patrice Pascual

"What do they look like, the people who hurt their kids?" Joyce Wattlington asks a group of ten or so prospective foster parents gathered in a Cleveland neighborhood. Wattlington is a Cuyahoga County social work supervisor and the creator of "Foster Aware Parties," a kind of snacks-and-sodas gathering modeled after Tupperware parties. But instead of plastic cups and measuring bowls, the topic here is troubled neighborhood families.

Like a smart game show host, Wattlington knows where the answers will lead, and she has a plant in the audience. At their previous meeting, the group spilled their thoughts about why kids end up in foster care, shaking their heads while sharing stories of parents gone wrong. Some admitted the child protection system has brushed their own families — a jailed cousin lost his kids, or a friend is raising the children of her drug-addicted daughter. But those people were familiar, and it was easy to see they were headed for trouble.

This time, they look around self-consciously — everyone seems so solid, is there really a failed parent among them? Then a lone person — someone who blends with the crowd but once lost her kids to the government — stands to tell her story. It's like testifying in church. She tells of evil habits, then a transformation, and finally redemption as she regained the custody of her children. She had to work hard for that privilege, and her listeners know it.

Prospective foster parents have lots of questions, and the birth parent, who is paid $50 to share her story, can refuse to answer any that cut too deep. The exchange is intended to teach potential foster parents to respect a birth parent before they take charge of someone else's child. Since foster parents in Cuyahoga County, Ohio, are expected to work with birth parents, they better face up to their feelings now.

Forty-five minutes later, the meeting breaks. Instead of getting snacks, participants use the time to swarm the birth parent. "People just want to touch her," Wattlington says, "and tell her how proud they are" of the way she's turned her life around.

The recruitment and training of foster care families in Cuyahoga County has been in overdrive for the past four years, and though hundreds of people attend these orientations each year, administrator Terri Ali says "there's never a dry eye in the house" when a birth parent shares her story. Bucking every trend, Cuyahoga increased its number of neighborhood foster homes from 501 in 1992 to 790 in 1997. That's a lot of tears.

While the prodigal parent creates a powerful image, Ali and Wattlington argue that something more profound is happening in these gatherings, something that can benefit the lives of hundreds of thousands of foster kids across the country. The two social workers are adherents of "Family to Family," a national child welfare reform movement spearheaded by the Annie E.

ENTERING CARE

Casey Foundation. It is built on the idea that local relationships and community support can help keep families together, and provide more stability for those children who ultimately need a home apart from their parents. Family to Family principles support the job that government must do in protecting children and enforcing laws, but hold little faith that overtaxed institutions can solve complex family problems. The initiative incorporates years of critical thinking and data analysis on the more than 500,000 American kids in foster care — two-thirds of whom are black or Hispanic, nearly 45 percent of whom enter care as babies or toddlers, and nearly all of whom are neglected rather than abused.

The report that follows looks at foster care reform in Cuyahoga County and Anne Arundel County, Maryland, another jurisdiction where Family to Family principles have taken root. "Experience in Family to Family suggests that achieving enduring reform in the child welfare system is difficult, but can be accomplished," concluded independent evaluators from the Research Triangle Institute and the School of Social Work at the University of North Carolina.

From Crisis, Opportunity

During the planning of Family to Family in the early 1990s, the Casey Foundation, together with community leaders and child welfare professionals nationwide, focused on the biggest challenges in protecting children and supporting families: the number of children at risk of abuse and neglect was growing; the supply of foster families was critically low and dropping; foster kids were isolated, housed far from familiar schools, churches, and friends; birth parents weren't receiving needed or promised services; neighborhoods didn't trust social workers or administrators who only visited during crises; and beleaguered agencies couldn't measure the effectiveness of their own efforts.

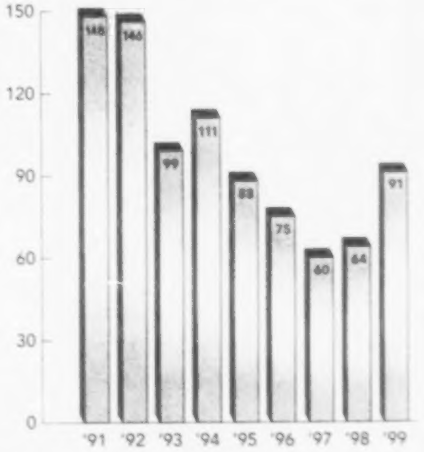
"There was a basic sense of what wasn't working," recalls John Mattingly, a senior associate at the Casey Foundation and Family to Family's initiative manager. "The large caseloads, enormous cynicism, short lifespan of agency leaders. It leaves everyone feeling, 'This agency doesn't care.'"

For much of the 1970s and '80s, the demand for foster care exploded as cheap drugs, recession, and crumbling cities pounded away at urban family life. Systems were awash with cases. Everywhere, foster care seemed out of control.

In 1980 Congress passed the Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act, declaring "family reunification" the goal for most kids in care. The intentions were good — birth parents would receive well-orchestrated social services and earn back the custody of their kids. But states were left with troublingly broad mandates, and the law's commitment to responsible reunification of children and families turned out to be more rhetoric than reality.

By the Numbers

FEWER CHILDREN ENTERING OUT-OF-HOME CARE IN ANNE ARUNDEL COUNTY



In Anne Arundel County, Maryland, the number of children entering out-of-home care decreased by 39 percent between 1991 and 1999.

Source: Anne Arundel County Department of Social Services

Services for birth parents — including drug treatment and family counseling — faced continuous funding cuts, particularly at the federal level. A five-year study detailed in the *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry* found that 57 percent of reported children who were kept out of foster care — under the hollow expectation that their families would receive comprehensive social services — were harmed again. *Congressional Quarterly* reported that in 1981, the ratio of spending on foster care to other child welfare services was 2 to 1. By 1992, the ratio was 8 to 1. For years, kids languished in "emergency" care.

What was clearly needed, says Mattingly, "was a dramatic change in child welfare systems," a goal that might sound laughable to anyone who has looked closely at the many programs, agencies, and personalities that drive child welfare from one jurisdiction to the next. But Mattingly, a former executive director of Children's Services in Lucas County, Ohio, and currently a member of New York City's Special Child Welfare Advisory Panel, has done that work, and he's not laughing.

Principle Meets Practice

In 1992 the Casey Foundation launched Family to Family as a pilot program in five states: Alabama, Maryland, New Mexico, Ohio, and Pennsylvania. Over three years, each site received grants of $2.5 million to develop networks of foster homes in the very neighborhoods where children were being removed. Social workers would be trained to know and cultivate the neighborhood's local support systems, often churches and school programs, and thus avoid taking children from their homes unless it was truly necessary. The goal for children who were removed would be to place them in permanent and stable homes as soon as possible, with outside adoption only sought when family reunification was deemed impossible.

The approach appealed to Judith Goodhand, executive director of the Cuyahoga County Department of Children and Family Services from 1992 to 1998. Like many child welfare administrators, she took over the agency after the ugly departure of its former director. The department, which serves 6,000 children in Cleveland and surrounding towns, was being threatened with an ACLU lawsuit for case mismanagement, and there had been "tremendous" worker turnover. Family to Family's strategies — for working with birth parents, building support for front-line workers, and shortening children's lengths of stay — addressed real problems facing her agency and offered a sense of hope.

"It wasn't new, radical stuff," Goodhand recalls thinking when she heard of Family to Family, but "when you have a demoralized agency, you have to give people a vision of what can be."

The Role of Data

The Casey Foundation provided funding that enabled Lynn Usher, professor of public welfare and administration at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, to build evaluation into every aspect of the initiative, providing Goodhand and other Family to Family grantees with 21st century tools for measuring caseloads, outcomes, and other child welfare data. State agencies, perpetually in trouble with Congress and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services for being unable to count the kids in care, generally measure their foster care population with a "snapshot," says Usher. Such a snapshot can tell you who is in care at the moment, but it misses the children who pass through the system quickly and overrepresents those in care the longest. "This isn't to minimize the fact that there are too many children who have long lengths of stay," Usher says, but not knowing their caseload prevents administrators from making good decisions.

For Ohio's Terri Ali, caseload data became a way to show potential neighborhood partners that community child protection could pay off in unexpected ways. When she sat down with a public school superintendent, data revealed that when children were removed from their home and neighborhood, local schools took a financial hit. "We just didn't think of that," Ali said. "But every time you move a school-age child from home and that child goes to a different school, the resources go with that child."

FAMILY TO FAMILY IS BUILT ON THE IDEA THAT LOCAL RELATIONSHIPS AND COMMUNITY SUPPORT CAN HELP KEEP FAMILIES TOGETHER, AND PROVIDE MORE STABILITY FOR THOSE CHILDREN WHO ULTIMATELY NEED A HOME APART FROM THEIR PARENTS.

In Anne Arundel County, Maryland, where caseworkers and supervisors can simultaneously review a child's case history from different computers, child welfare director Ed Bloom holds conference calls to ask tough questions about placement decisions for children and families in crisis. It's often late in the day, and everyone is exhausted and tense. Still Bloom asks, have all efforts been made to place the child with a caring family member instead of an outside family?

In one case, Bloom recalls, "supposedly the father had never seen the child, and mom was incarcerated. 'Well, how did she support herself?' " Bloom asked the caseworker. A check of child support records, maintained by another department, showed that the child's father had paid support fully and on time; he could take custody. Technology is helping departments to stay true to Family to Family principles, and make the extra effort to rely on families first.

Successfully implementing Family to Family also requires coordination among various agencies that often have poor histories of sharing information. "There's a lack of respect [for child welfare work] on the part of other agencies — from juvenile justice, mental health," says Bloom. Judith Goodhand agrees:

(continued on page 9)

"YOU HAVEN'T SEEN OUR NAME IN THE PAPER MUCH," says Larry Houseman, assistant director of administration for Anne Arundel County's child welfare agency. Since child welfare coverage typically means tales of horrific suffering or worker incompetence, staying out of the paper is no small accomplishment. But it's more than luck, argues Houseman. Each month, 400 or so referrals are screened by intake workers, 200-plus investigations are put in motion, and that work, plus much more, is rigorously tracked in a computerized database. Technology has made the casework transparent. It would be very difficult for a kid in this county to fall through the cracks.

While child welfare director Ed Bloom was computerizing casework early on, Family to Family pushed its application to new heights. Just as Family to Family requires that people who rarely work together in traditional foster care — say birth parents and foster parents — form a team in support of a child, so it demands cooperation among other initially awkward partners: information technology staff and social workers.

"We started with Casey in '93, and it took a year-and-a-half for me to understand what they were talking about," says out-of-home care coordinator Chris Seipp. "Program people don't think that way [about data]. Once we realized what kinds of information we had to capture ... we could talk about, 'Where are these kids? Where do they go?' That was real exciting."

With encouragement from Casey, Seipp and others worked with their agency's information technology staff to design reports that reveal case trends in real time. Seipp learned SPSS, a sophisticated statistical software that allows her to show caseworkers that the information they gather about kids and families doesn't just sit on a shelf. Intake workers even spend less time doing interviews, says systems analyst Gail Bozek, now that database forms are efficiently organized.

It was Seipp's good fortune that agency head Ed Bloom believes in the power of the microchip, and that Bozek and systems manager Steve Sandbank understand social work. A former caseworker, Sandbank says program knowledge is more valuable than all the "pretty code" an outside consultant could write. He's spent plenty of time with state and federal contractors who are trying to create a one-size-fits-all child welfare database. Such projects seem to vanish into the ether.

This system is a far cry from the data-capturing efforts in most states, which are reported to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to generate federal statistics about kids in care. Because states aren't managing cases, they can afford to issue data reports three months in arrears. At the local level, that delay is unacceptably long — those numbers represent kids in crisis who need agency help.

Houseman adds that many agencies are "afraid to death of technology" and are happy to do no more data collection or analysis than what the states or the feds require. For a cost of about four percent of its child welfare budget, "we think we get a better return," he says.

A DATABASE TOUR

The first page begins, innocuously enough, by asking for the child's name, address, and birth date. Data field upon data field follow, the electronic questions become more insistent. Who is the child's mother? Who is making the complaint? Is this an emergency case? Once the questions are completed, a child will be entered in the county's child welfare database. It goes on record that someone — a teacher, a neighbor, an aunt — thinks this child is being neglected or abused.

If it's an emergency, the intake worker sends an urgent e-mail to the child protection staff and follows up with a phone call. If there's the possibility of sexual or serious physical abuse, medical staff at a 24-hour support center may receive an electronic alert too, as will police, who have an office on site. They can each access the database to see whether the child, or the person suspected of hurting him, has been reported before. And a quick check of available foster homes shows that, if necessary, the child can be placed in a home close to his school. All this can happen even before a child protection worker gets into his car.

And at the end of the day, the system will generate a letter to the complainant, telling them the disposition of their call. And Ed Bloom and his staff will be able to see every decision along the way. "Most organizations don't know where they are or where they're going," says Larry Houseman. "We know."

(continued from page 7)

"At the very heart of child protection is a child being hurt," she says. And when it happens, especially when it hits the papers, there's a tendency to point fingers: "Who screwed up — which agency?"

Creating New Relationships

A key Family to Family strategy is to create a child-centric team including foster parents, birth parents, social workers, and neighborhood support systems. Caseworkers, often beleaguered and egregiously underpaid, have to work closely with people they may not like — in particular, birth parents. "Some workers come in because they love kids," says Dorothy Boyle of Anne Arundel. "It's not that they love families."

In traditional foster care, says Joyce Wattlington, "we act like that parent has simply stopped existing. It's easier to take the kids than confront the parent."

In Family to Family, caseworkers learn to build the relationship between foster and birth parents on the child's behalf. "Within the first week, you get the whole family team together and say, 'We're working toward reunification.' It puts the biological parent immediately at ease," says Anne Arundel case manager Camber Parker. Parker then has to send an emotionally mixed message to the foster parent: "I continue to reiterate, 'take care of the child as if he is your own, but then be really happy [when he is returned to his birth parent].' "

For foster parents who are anxious about the child's well-being after reunification, the transition back to the birth families is difficult. "We want the child to go back home, but we worry many nights about their safety," said Emily Pinkney, a therapeutic foster parent in Maryland. A "therapeutic" parent is trained to foster the most needy kids, and one of her wards, a 10-year-old girl, had to be rocked by Pinkney every day for an hour. "Where are they going get this?" Pinkney asks. "It really worries you."

Foster parents might also be on the receiving end of a birth parent's anger, which Joyce Wattlington says is often a cover for her shame. "Many times she is angry with you because you are doing her job." But Wattlington says foster parents need to recognize that the child must see his birth parent given respect. "You've got to have that dialogue. If you don't want to, you don't need these kids in your home."

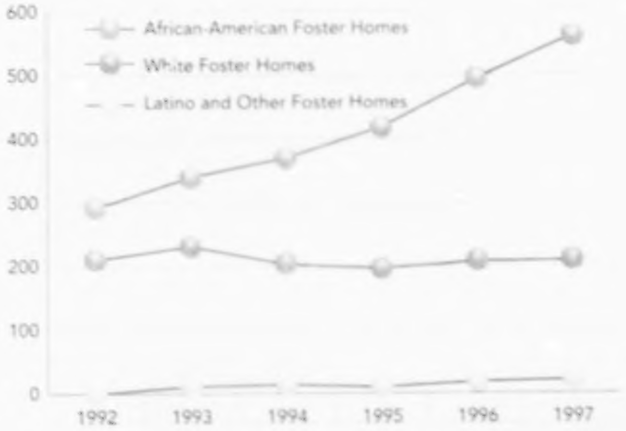
That faith in families gives hope to Gloria Hopkins.

By the Numbers

MORE FOSTER FAMILIES FOR CUYAHOGA COUNTY

Between 1992 and 1997, the total number of licensed foster homes in Cuyahoga County increased by 58 percent — from 501 to 790.

Source: Cuyahoga County Department of Children and Family Services



Gloria's Story

Hopkins gave birth her now 6-year-old son, Sied, on her way out of prison. She was in for drugs, and had a 15-year habit by the time she was 30 years old. She couldn't find housing — the HUD list was miles long — and her parents already had custody of her older boy, who was 8.

A friend of a friend in jail was willing to take the baby, which sounded like a good idea. When Hopkins was released, she visited him on and off for a while, but the visits trailed off when he was a toddler, and Hopkins began to feel she had little to offer him. Fast forward to last spring, when Sied was 5. Hopkins got a call saying her boy had been neglected, sexually abused, and left alone in the dark for days by his caretaker. Social workers tracked her down through child support payments, which she made from her job assembling cable components. And because Family to Family was in place, Gloria Hopkins won the opportunity to become a mom. She swears she's ready.

"I have my own place now," she said. "I've been clean for six years." The judge overseeing Sied's case wouldn't let her waltz into his life, but Anne Arundel social worker Rachel Black put her in contact with the couple who took him into foster care. Hopkins won visiting rights, and takes her son to her home every weekend.

"When I first started to pick him up, I'd say, 'Can I do this? Can I do that?'" to the foster parents. "They said, 'You're his mom.'" She was amazed that she had any say in how her son was raised. "I didn't know it went like that." The parents even agreed on a punishment strategy for the 6-year-old: He is disciplined by sitting in the "naughty chair," not by being hit. Hopkins is proud to have thought up that approach.

Shared strategies and information make a child's life a lot easier, says Joyce Wattlington. "The foster parent needs to know what kind of hair product to use, his lotion, the cereal he likes." It also gives the foster parent a chance to see the birth parent as caretaker, and the child to see many adults working together on his behalf.

Hopkins is waiting until the judge decides she can take full custody of her son. She's not sure how she feels about the latest change in federal law, the 1997 Adoption and Safe Families Act that moves to terminate a parent's custody after a child has spent about a year in care. She wants other parents to have the chances she does, but knows it's hard for a child to wait around. She's glad to have Sied in her life. "He is smart and he forgives me," she said. "He doesn't want to leave me."

Growing Families

Foster care systems in Family to Family's pilot cities haven't found nirvana, and two pilot sites did not maintain the model after a change in leadership. But through evaluation data, Family to Family adherents say they can prove they are onto a better way to serve fragile kids and families. (The formal evaluation of Family to Family is online at www.unc.edu/lynnu/f2fintro.htm.) Like other child welfare programs, the agencies participating in Family to Family struggle with huge staff turnovers; they face the risk that a new director or governor will detail the new practices; and they work hard to retain trained foster parents who don't get enough support. They are also victims of their own success: A cut in caseloads almost certainly means cuts in an agency's future funding.

Judith Goodhand has left her post in Cleveland and is helping other agencies learn about Family to Family. Los Angeles has a pilot program under way; New York and others are interested. She cautions them all that Family to Family's success must be demonstrated to many stakeholders: community and neighborhood organizers and residents, political leaders, and related social welfare agencies. "As long as any reform stays within the walls of an agency, it's very fragile," she says.

That sounds like a good reason to get outside.

Patrice Pascual is deputy director of the Casey Journalism Center for Children and Families at the University of Maryland's College of Journalism.

FAMILY TO FAMILY TOOLS

The Annie E. Casey Foundation has developed a series of publications on the experiences of the Family to Family Initiative in rebuilding foster care. The intent of these Family to Family tools is to provide child welfare agencies with a successful model of foster care that is neighborhood based, family focused, and culturally sensitive. Written by child welfare administrators and other national experts, the 17 Family to Family tools are:

Recruitment, Training, and Support: The Essential Tools of Foster Care

The Need for Self-Evaluation: Using Data to Guide Policy and Practice

Strategic Communications: Media Relations for Child Welfare

Building Support for Innovation Inside Child Welfare Agencies

Building Community Partnerships in Child Welfare

Part One: *Building Partnerships with Neighborhoods and Local Communities*

Part Two: *Team Decisionmaking: Involving the Family and Community in Child Welfare Decisions*

Part Three: *Walking our Talk in the Neighborhoods: Partnerships between Professionals and Natural Helpers*

Part Four: *People Helping People: Partnerships between Professionals and Natural Helpers*

> THE INTENT OF THE FAMILY TO FAMILY TOOLS IS TO PROVIDE CHILD WELFARE AGENCIES WITH A SUCCESSFUL MODEL OF FOSTER CARE THAT IS NEIGHBORHOOD BASED, FAMILY FOCUSED, AND CULTURALLY SENSITIVE.

The Challenge of Drug Abuse in Child Welfare

Part One: *Back from the Brink: Women, Crack, and the Child Welfare System*

Part Two: *Working with Drug-Affected Families: Training for Child Welfare Workers*

Part Three: *START: A Child Welfare Model for Drug-Affected Families*

Collaboration for Change

Part One: *A Model for Public and Private Child Welfare Partnership*

Part Two: *Partnerships between Corrections and Child Welfare*

Shortening Children's Stay in Temporary Care

Part One: *Policies and Practice*

Part Two: *Innovative Programs*

Building Support for Child Welfare's Frontline Workers

Part One: *Safety First: Dealing with the Daily Challenges of Child Welfare*

Part Two: *The Resiliency Workshop: A Tool to Lessen Burnout in Child Welfare*

The Casey Foundation has also produced two short booklets and a 12-minute video about the initiative. All of the tools and booklets are available online at http://www.aecf.org/familytofamily/tools.htm. You may also call or write to:

Family to Family Initiative
The Annie E. Casey Foundation
701 St. Paul Street
Baltimore, MD 21202
Phone: 410.547.6600
Fax: 410.547.6624

THE GRADUATES

THE CASEY

By Kristin Coffey

"Mary"[1] was 13 years old when her father murdered her mother. The teen was placed with her older half-sister, who could not cope with the traumatized youth.

"George" was 12 when he was removed from his birth family because of abuse and neglect. Severely learning disabled, he spent much of his adolescence in a residential facility for troubled youth.

"Karen" was first placed in foster care at age 10. By the time she was 14, she had lived in three foster homes and a residential treatment center.

"Bob" had three "blown" foster home placements by age 14. He then spent the better part of two years in and out of psychiatric hospitals and shelters.

Failed by adults who were responsible for their care, these four young people have more in common than troubled childhoods and family instability. Overcoming long odds, each of the former foster kids is today a productive young adult. Mary, for example, recently graduated from college and teaches rock climbing and other outdoor skills. And George, now 24 and living on his own, holds two jobs — one in a hospital records department and the other as a medical dispatcher.

These young people also share another characteristic: Each found stable family foster care after their referral to Casey Family Services, the direct-service arm of the Annie E. Casey Foundation. Currently offering a range of services to prevent and treat child abuse and neglect, Casey Family Services was established in 1976 to provide long-term foster care for children who had little likelihood of reunification with their birth families or adoption.[2]

To help assess the effectiveness of its long-term foster care, Casey Family Services recently completed a follow-up study of youth who had been served by the program. Among the study's key findings: Casey "alumni" have higher rates of high school completion and employment, and a lower rate of teen pregnancy than young people who participated in comparable studies of public and private foster care. The alumni study also affirmed some of the key principles of quality foster care. "When you look at how our youngsters are doing," says Raymond Torres, executive director of Casey Family Services, "you find that stability, continuity of care, and individualized help have provided a positive experience for children who have been removed from their families of origin."

"An Opportunity to Live Within a Family"

For a majority of the nation's more than 500,000 children in out-of-home care, foster care is a temporary experience that lasts until they can return safely to their birth families. About one-quarter of these children return to their birth families within six months, and about two-thirds within two years. There are, however, some children in foster care who will neither be reunified with their families of origin nor adopted. These kids are generally older, often have had multiple placements, and frequently require more intensive services for emotional and behavioral disorders. For such children, long-term family foster care is often the best alternative.

"We try to provide these kids with an opportunity to live within a family," says Maria Rodriguez-Immerman, director of the Bridgeport Division of Casey Family Services. "Even if the kids will never be adopted or go back home, at least they can benefit from the nurturing, the caring, the supervision, and the development of values and moral principles that happen when a child grows up in a family."

Included in the Casey study were foster care alumni who met the following criteria: They were over the age of 18, had been with the agency for at least a year,

---

[1] Not her real name.

[2] For additional information about Casey Family Services, see its *1998 At A Glance*, available without charge, or visit the agency's Web site at www.caseyfamilyservices.org.

> AMONG THE STUDY'S KEY FINDINGS: CASEY "ALUMNI" HAVE HIGHER RATES OF HIGH SCHOOL COMPLETION AND EMPLOYMENT, AND A LOWER RATE OF TEEN PREGNANCY THAN YOUNG PEOPLE WHO PARTICIPATED IN COMPARABLE STUDIES OF PUBLIC AND PRIVATE FOSTER CARE.

and had been out of care for at least a year. Of the 209 alumni who met these criteria, 161 were located and 115 agreed to participate. The results of the study were based on case histories, a written questionnaire, and face-to-face interviews. "We are a little restricted in what we can do from an analytic perspective, because the study has a limited sample size," says Ben Kerman, research associate at Casey Family Services. "However, we still have a very rich database, and we are learning from the numbers and from what the alumni told us made a difference for them."

Like many children served by public child welfare systems, the Casey alumni entered care with "extensive special needs, disappointments, and hurts," according to the study. In 86 percent of the cases, there was a family history of abuse and neglect, "which often began early and continued for lengthy periods of time." Fifty percent of the children had medical problems, 42 percent performed poorly in school, and 24 percent had prenatal or neonatal problems. "You are talking about youngsters who started out life with some physical difficulties, some medical difficulties, and some difficulties engaging in school early on," says Raymond Torres.

The adult development outcomes — "the ultimate gauge for success in Casey care," in the words of the study — were encouraging. The rate of high school completion for Casey alumni was 73 percent, compared to 60 percent of children participating in other follow-up studies. Sixty-eight percent of the Casey alumni were working full time or part time, compared to 48 percent. And 68 percent of the alumni delayed parenting beyond the age of 23, compared to 40 percent. "We thought these three areas were significant," says Raymond Torres. "If our youngsters are able to complete high school, find employment, and delay parenting, they are in a better position to move toward self-sufficiency."

The study also found that Casey alumni were actively engaged in community activities. Eighty percent of the alumni interviewed had some informal community involvement — for example, participating in a neighborhood watch program. Moreover, 15 percent were regularly volunteering to serve in youth organizations, soup kitchens, and other community groups.

Another finding was that about three-quarters of the alumni said they felt "secure, nurtured, and challenged constructively" by their foster families and social workers. Such positive feelings are reflected in the exceptional 61 percent of Casey alumni who were still in contact with their former foster families. "Our understanding," says Raymond Torres, "is that nationally about 20 percent of youngsters who depart from foster care remain in contact with their foster parents."

Of course, not every Casey placement is successful nor every child outcome positive. Twenty-nine percent of the Casey alumni reported that they had been arrested at least once since turning 18, compared with 32 percent of young people in comparable follow-up studies. Eleven percent of the alumni, according to the study, "said they used alcohol or drugs to help forget about their problems."

Stability and Support

Children referred to Casey Family Services often have had multiple foster care placements, which can make them hardened and distrustful. In the alumni study, many of the youth reported that stable relationships with the same foster family and social worker made a substantial difference in their lives. "We try to promote stability in the foster home and stop the movement," says Joy Duva, associate director of Planning and Policy for Casey Family Services. "This means providing a range of supports to both the foster parents and the child."

The supports include comprehensive training for foster parents, frequent meetings with a social worker to discuss issues and progress, respite care that provides occasional relief from the demands of foster parenting, contact with other foster families for mutual support, and conferences to increase knowledge and skills in raising children with special needs. "Casey has provided training on behavior management, relationships with the children's biological family, all types of training," says foster parent Myrna Ortiz. "A recent workshop was on the Mandt system," which teaches foster parents and others how to handle aggressive and uncooperative behavior.

A key support is a team approach to developing a child's treatment plan and monitoring progress. Teams generally consist of the foster parents, a biological relative (a parent, grandparent, aunt, uncle, or sibling), the Casey social worker, the state social worker, the therapist, and any other significant person in the life of the child — a mentor, a tutor, or a teacher. Depending on age and other factors, the child can be part of the team. "It is a wonderful way of collaborating and really keeping all of the issues of that child very present at the table," says Maria Rodriguez-Immerman. "Everyone works together to

FOSTER PARENTS RECEIVE A RANGE OF SUPPORTS FROM CASEY FAMILY SERVICES, INCLUDING COMPREHENSIVE TRAINING, FREQUENT MEETINGS WITH A SOCIAL WORKER TO DISCUSS ISSUES AND PROGRESS, AND CONFERENCES TO INCREASE KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS IN RAISING CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS.

help the child accomplish his or her goals in life."

The importance of developing children's independent living skills — both well before and after they reach the age of 18 — was also confirmed by the alumni study. Each year, approximately 25,000 youth nationwide "age out" of foster care, and many of them are unprepared for adult living. The federal Independent Living Program helps older foster children earn a high school diploma, participate in vocational training or education, and learn daily living skills. "Unfortunately," says Anthony Maluccio, a professor of social work at Boston College and a member of the Casey Family Services Board of Managers, programs that encourage independent living "tend to pay attention to young people as they get close to the point of discharge, rather than earlier, which is when most parents try to help their kids with preparation for life — not at age 17 and a half."

Casey Family Services begins teaching independent living skills at the point of placement. Casey social workers work with children and foster parents to provide age-appropriate experiences that help children assume greater responsibility for their own care and well being. As foster children head into their late teens, they become involved in more specific programs around budgeting, employment, or higher education. "Helping children to transition from foster care to independence is a life-long process that we believe needs to start as soon as the child comes to our agency," says Raymond Torres.

Providing support to children after they reach the age of 18 is another critical element of the successful transition to independent living. These services include helping with job training and college costs, and providing support to foster families to whom college-age children can temporarily return. "As an agency, we are available during that transition time, just as we are for our own kids," says Joy Duva. "We don't say to our own kids at 18, 'Well, goodbye. You can do it now,' because we know kids can't. They need that ongoing support."

Costs and Benefits

As a privately endowed agency, Casey Family Services has the flexibility and resources to design and deliver high-quality services for children in its care. But what is the relevance of such care to public child welfare systems? While most public agencies would agree with the principles and practices of Casey care, they lack the resources to provide such comprehensive services.

In response, Anthony Maluccio suggests that policymakers and practitioners take a broader view of the costs and benefits of foster care services. "When you consider that many of the kids in foster care in some public agencies will engage in behavior that leads to their being placed in institutions for delinquent young people or in psychiatric facilities, the ultimate cost is much greater than it would be if we were able to provide the kind of ongoing supports that agencies like Casey are providing," says Maluccio.

To contribute to a better understanding of the costs and benefits of foster care, Casey Family Services is currently working with the University of North Carolina and the state of Connecticut to conduct a study that compares the services and outcomes of Casey Family Services and those of the public system. "Our interest is not to be critical of the state," says Raymond Torres. "Our interest is to be able to gauge whether, in the final analysis, we are paying more or not for our services. And even if we are paying more, but our kids are doing better, then that raises an ethical and values issue that we will all have to grapple with."

Kristin Coffey, a former communications associate with the Annie E. Casey Foundation, is a freelance writer and editor.

"QUITTING A BEEF"

By Rose Gutfeld

The abduction and shooting death of 12-year-old Darryl Dayan Hall in January 1997 shocked Washington, D.C., a city that had grown accustomed to gang-related violence and murder. As police searched for the killers, and city and national leaders publicly deplored the bloodshed, residents of the neighborhood where Hall lived braced for the inevitable violent retaliation.

Hall's killers eventually went to prison, but the retaliation never came. Instead, soon after Hall's death, a dozen or so young men from the two rival gangs involved met for a mediation session — and chicken dinner — in the office of social activist Robert L. Woodson, Sr. The youths were unarmed, though they wore bulletproof vests. Cell phones connected each side to armed back-up outside, in case the meeting proved to be a police setup. The session began with a prayer, and, by mutual agreement, there was no swearing, no interrupting, and no use of the "N" word.

The meeting and those that followed marked a watershed in the history of the Benning Terrace housing complex, where the gangs, or "crews," operated. The long-warring factions agreed to a truce. Over the following months, a dilapidated, violence-ridden complex, where residents were afraid to leave their apartments, was transformed into a peaceful, well-managed development, where children now run and laugh on the way home from school. Young men who were on track for prison or early death renounced violence and are now gainfully employed as housing administrators and electricians and carpenters.

"People feel a sense of relative calm and peace around there now," says the Rev. Richard C. Corbin, Sr., pastor of the First Rock Baptist Church in Benning Heights and a former military officer. In the past, he said, "I found the Benning Terrace combat zone more threatening than the one I knew in El Salvador."

With its transformation, Benning Terrace also stands as a striking demonstration of a "violence-free zone," an initiative of the nonprofit National Center for Neighborhood Enterprise, which Woodson founded. In setting up a violence-free zone, the center acts much like a venture capitalist: It provides seed money — in this case, training and management assistance, as well as capital — to promising "start-ups." In a violence-free zone, the start-ups are groups that have "trusting relationships with the at-risk population," says Woodson, "and, consequently, the credibility" to help restore peace to violence-plagued neighborhoods.

Woodson is convinced that efforts to effect permanent social improvement must be led by local groups — people who understand a neighborhood's problems and who are known and respected by its residents. "We go into the community and look for people who are solving problems," says Woodson, who contends that inner-city residents often are not given sufficient credit for knowing how to improve their own situations. "The solutions can't be external."

"The Street Game"

In Benning Terrace, the center identified a promising local organization: the Alliance of Concerned Men, a group of African-American men who were already working with at-risk youth in the area. The alliance members understood the problems of the neighborhood and could serve as role models for troubled young men: Tyrone Parker, president of the alliance, had served time for bank robbery and lost a son to street violence. Another member had been addicted to drugs.

Benning Terrace, a 275-unit public housing development in Washington's Southeast section, was a

"WE GO INTO THE COMMUNITY AND LOOK FOR PEOPLE WHO ARE SOLVING PROBLEMS. THE SOLUTIONS CAN'T BE EXTERNAL."

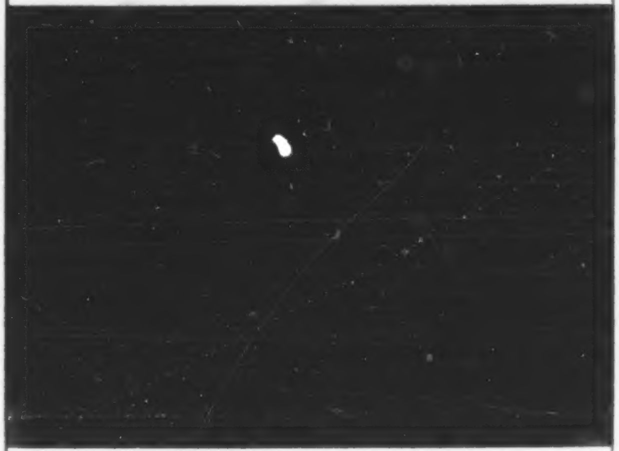
tough environment for the work of the center and the alliance. According to a September 1998 Howard University study, the 1997 median income of Benning Terrace households was $6,156, with six out of ten households listing public assistance as the major source of income. When David Gilmore, the District of Columbia Housing Receiver and a key player in the revival of Benning Terrace, visited the development for the first time in 1995, his driver felt so threatened that he refused to enter. Gilmore initially put a portion of the development on the list of public housing projects to be razed.

At the time of Darryl Hall's death, the two rival gangs operating in Benning Terrace were the Circle Crew and the Avenue Crew. In 1996 there were six homicides in Benning Terrace, with three others in each of the two previous years, according to the Howard study. Woodson, who had been working with the Alliance of Concerned Men and other groups as he looked for a community in which to demonstrate his initiative, took Hall's death as a sign. "God has selected a neighborhood," Woodson remembers thinking.

Arthur "Rico" Rush, an alliance member, recalls that the night he heard about Hall's death, he could not sleep and telephoned Tyrone Parker, who also was awake. Together, they went into the neighborhood and began talking with — and listening to — members of the crews. "Nobody trusted us at first," says Rush, who said the alliance won over the crew members by approaching them "on their own level. We did not judge them. We were from the street ourselves. No one had approached them with an open mind before."

Working with Woodson's National Center, the alliance told the young men that they would help them find a new way of life and end the community's cycle of violence. Such help could include training in life skills — for example, getting drivers' licenses and opening bank accounts. Alliance members also told the young men that they would help them find jobs and get into drug-treatment programs.

But before any of this could happen, the warring parties of Benning Terrace would have to put down their guns and agree to a truce. At the initial meeting in Woodson's office, the two crews arrived in separate vans that had been supplied by a Maryland car dealership, where one of the alliance members worked. Fearing a setup, several leaders of the gangs stayed



A DILAPIDATED, VIOLENCE-RIDDEN COMPLEX, WHERE RESIDENTS WERE AFRAID TO LEAVE THEIR APARTMENTS, WAS TRANSFORMED INTO A PEACEFUL, WELL-MANAGED DEVELOPMENT.

away, sending underlings who could report back. The mentors listened to the young men talk about the violence in their neighborhood and how it was claiming younger and younger lives. Asked how the "beef" between the two groups had started, no one at the table could remember. Everyone at the meeting agreed that Hall would want the groups to put down their weapons.

By the end of the first meeting, according to Woodson, it was agreed that there would be no retaliation for Hall's death. After subsequent meetings over the next few weeks, the two sides agreed to the truce. Rather than warring crews, the groups became the Concerned Brothers of Benning Terrace.

Many of the people involved say they were struck by how readily the young men turned away from their violent lives. "The easiest part was getting people to put down their guns," says Woodson. "...No one they respected had ever asked them to do it."

Thomas Derrick Ross, a former crew member and drug dealer who participated in the initiative and now works as a housing manager for the District Housing Authority, says he wanted to leave "the street game" when he saw younger kids getting involved. But he says that he "couldn't fathom" a way out of the only life he knew. "There was no way to stop on your own," he explains. "If you stop by yourself, you get killed."

"Monumental Importance"

Although stopping the bloodshed was a huge step, it was only the first one. Peace, Woodson knew, would not endure unless the former gang members also had access to jobs and life-skills training and received continued support and encouragement from their mentors.

Fortunately for him and Benning Terrace, help on the jobs front was provided by Housing Receiver Gilmore, who read a newspaper article about the efforts to produce a truce and called Woodson to ask how he could help. Gilmore attended a mediation session in Woodson's office, where the crew members asked what Gilmore would do about the graffiti that lined the walls of the development. Gilmore replied that he would not remove the graffiti, which consisted of tributes to friends and relatives who had died in the street violence, but that the young men themselves could do the job. "They took me up on the offer in a stunning way," he says.

Gilmore agreed to pay 35 young men $6.50 an hour to remove graffiti. The job itself, slated to last six months, was completed in much less time, and some of the men moved on to landscaping work. Others got training from Housing Authority staff members and apprenticeship positions with building trade unions. Ross, the former drug dealer, ultimately completed a management training program at Catholic University before getting a full-time position with the Housing Authority.

As the original work team moved on, other neighborhood residents took their places. Gilmore said the Housing Authority now employs around 150 such people at Benning Terrace and two other sites in the District, where he is working on violence-free initiatives with Woodson's center.

Gilmore describes his participation in the transformation of Benning Terrace as a once-in-a-lifetime experience. "If I don't do anything else of significant importance in my life, I will already have done something that from my perspective is of monumental importance," he says. "I have participated in saving hundreds of kids' lives."

Gilmore also removed Benning Terrace properties from the list of buildings slated to be destroyed, a move that spared taxpayers an amount he estimates is "easily in the millions of dollars." Peace has brought other savings as well, including the money that no longer is spent on emergency medical care, victims' burials, and overtime by Housing Authority police.

With the Housing Authority providing the jobs, Woodson and the alliance focused on life skills and encouragement. Many of the young men and women had never had Social Security cards or shoes other than sneakers. Others were not involved in raising their children. The alliance helped the young people clear up legal problems and obtain high school equivalency degrees. The mentors also assisted in negotiating peace treaties when groups from other neighborhoods came in and started causing trouble.

> A FORMER CREW MEMBER AND DRUG DEALER SAW NO WAY OF LEAVING "THE STREET GAME" ON HIS OWN: "IF YOU STOP BY YOURSELF, YOU GET KILLED."

Around the end of 1997, the alliance received a grant from the Housing Authority that enabled its members to quit their jobs and do alliance work full-time.

Woodson and the alliance ended the mediation sessions in Benning Terrace with hugs and took the young people to basketball games. The two groups also hold what has become an annual awards dinner. "We celebrate every little success," says Woodson, who raised money to buy suits the young men could wear to the dinner. He has taken groups on white-water rafting expeditions and on trips to visit community activists in cities where the National Center is working with other groups. With obvious pleasure, Woodson recently showed a visitor a gift: a piece of wood signed by every member of the Concerned

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Brothers and Sisters of Benning Terrace, the name the group adopted after women joined.

After a while, some of the mediation sessions started being held in the neighborhood, in Rev. Corbin's church. As the young people became involved in community service work, the older men made clear to their younger counterparts that they would be there for them no matter what. "Even if some kid falls by the wayside," says Parker, "we are there to pick him up."

The leaders and the young people at Benning Terrace have provided aid and inspiration to National Center initiatives in other District neighborhoods and other cities. In the District's Park Morton and Garfield Terrace neighborhoods, for example, a peace initiative helped end violence between warring groups of young women. Nationwide, the center also has established violence-free zones in Hartford, Indianapolis, Dallas, San Antonio, and Los Angeles. In 1997 the Annie E. Casey Foundation granted $750,000 over three years to the National Center as matching support for replication efforts.

"Moral Decisions"

Three years after Darryl Hall's death, Benning Terrace gives no physical sign that it was once a combat zone. Well-manicured lawns are lined by flower beds, windows are intact, walls are painted and graffiti-free. Children play outside and wave happily at a passing car.

At the Housing Authority office where he now works, former drug dealer Thomas Ross handles call after call on a speaker phone while working with colleagues in his office and on his computer. He expresses pride that Benning Terrace has become a good place to live. He also speaks of the emotional and psychological stress of the huge change he has made in switching from his life in the street to the life he has now. "Quitting a beef is not like quitting a job," says Ross.

Perhaps an equally harsh reality is that a single violence-free zone cannot magically cure all of the ills of Benning Terrace and the surrounding neighborhood after years of neglect and decline. "People are still poor," says Rev. Corbin, noting there are still too many adults without good jobs and children growing up without their fathers. As in other neighborhoods across the country, drugs remain a problem, as does teenage pregnancy. And finding jobs for young people will be that much harder in the next economic downturn.

Still, no one involved in the transformation of Benning Terrace expresses fear that the young people already in the program will turn back from their new direction, even if faced with an economic recession or a new drug epidemic. "When you change the moral decisions that these kids make, I don't care what comes along," says Woodson. "Those kids will never go back to those lives."

Gilmore agrees, but warns, "We could lose Benning Terrace again" if future generations do not get the same opportunities and guidance as the Concerned Brothers and Sisters. "This has to be an ongoing activity," he says.

And Thomas Ross says he worries about the younger children of the development, who see the example set by him and others but who continue to be exposed to violent lifestyles at school and elsewhere. "Will they do what we do now," he asks, "or will they do what we did then?"

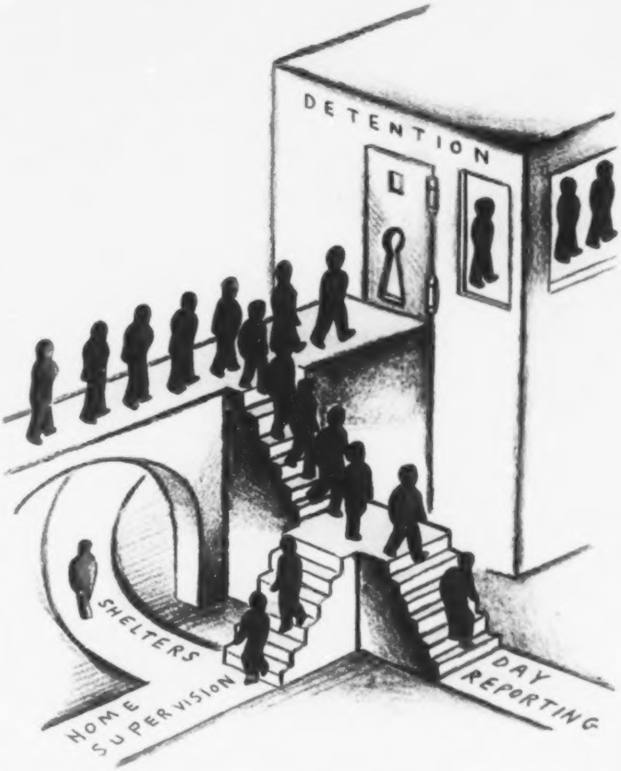
Rose Gutfeld, a former reporter for The Wall Street Journal *and editor for* Congressional Quarterly, *is a freelance writer who lives in Chevy Chase, Maryland.*

JUVENILE JAILHOUSE ROCKED

By Bill Rust

REFORMING DETENTION IN CHICAGO, PORTLAND, AND SACRAMENTO

THE JDAI APPROACH TO PRETRIAL DETENTION: SECURE CUSTODY FOR DANGEROUS YOUTH AND LESS RESTRICTIVE SUPERVISION FOR KIDS WHO POSE LITTLE RISK OF REOFFENDING OR FLIGHT.



Each year hundreds of thousands of kids charged with delinquent acts are locked up in juvenile detention facilities. Between 1987 and 1996, the number of delinquency cases involving pretrial detention increased by 38 percent. Nearly 70 percent of children in public detention centers are in facilities operating above their design capacity. And according to a new report from the U.S. Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP), secure detention "was nearly twice as likely in 1996 for cases involving black youth as for cases involving whites, even after controlling for offense."[1]

Of the many troubling facts about pretrial juvenile detention perhaps the most disturbing one is that many incarcerated youth should not be there at all. These are the kids who pose little risk of committing a new offense before their court dates or failing to appear for court — the two authorized purposes of juvenile detention. "When you talk to judges, prosecutors, or anyone involved in the juvenile justice system," says Bart Lubow, senior associate at the Annie E. Casey Foundation, "many of them say things like, 'We locked that kid up to teach him a lesson.' Or, 'We locked him up for his own good.' Or, 'We locked him up because his parents weren't available.' Or, 'We locked him up to get a mental health assessment.' None of these reasons are reflected in statute or professional standards."

In many jurisdictions, the problem of arbitrary admissions to detention is compounded by an absence of alternatives to either locked confinement or outright release. Moreover, inefficient case processing by the juvenile justice system unnecessarily prolongs a young person's stay in confinement and increases overall detention populations, often to dangerous and unhealthy levels. According to Jeffrey

---

[1] *Juvenile Offenders and Victims: 1999 National Report*, Howard N. Snyder and Melissa Sickmund, September 1999.

Butts, a senior research associate at the Urban Institute who directed the OJJDP Delays in Juvenile Justice Sanctions Project, almost half of the nation's large jurisdictions take more than 90 days to dispose of cases — the maximum time suggested by professional standards of juvenile justice.

The inappropriate use of secure detention poses hazards for youth, jurisdictions, and society at large. Research indicates that detention does not deter future offending, but it does increase the likelihood that children will be placed out of their homes in the future, even when controlling for offense, prior history, and other factors. "Children who are detained, rather than let go to their parents or released to some other kind of program, are statistically much more likely to be incarcerated at the end of the process," says Mark Soler, president of the Youth Law Center. "If they are released, and they stay out of trouble, judges are more likely to let them stay released when it comes to disposition. If they are locked up until disposition, judges are more likely to keep them locked up afterwards."

For taxpayers, the financial costs of indiscriminately using secure detention are high. Between 1985 and 1995, the operating expenses for detention facilities more than doubled to nearly $820 million — a figure that does not include capital costs and debt service for constructing and remodeling detention centers. For public officials, the cost of overusing detention can include expensive and time-consuming litigation for overcrowded and inadequate conditions of confinement in their facilities.

"The Least Favorite Kids in America"

In December 1992 the Annie E. Casey Foundation launched the Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative (JDAI). Based in part on a successful detention reform effort in Broward County (Fort Lauderdale), Florida, JDAI sought to demonstrate that communities could improve their detention systems without sacrificing public safety. The Casey Foundation awarded grants to five urban jurisdictions,[2] each of which pursued four major objectives:

- to reach consensus among all juvenile justice agencies about the purpose of secure detention and to eliminate its inappropriate or unnecessary use;
- to reduce the number of alleged delinquents who fail to appear in court or commit a new offense;
- to use limited juvenile justice resources in a more efficient manner by developing responsible alternatives to secure confinement rather than adding new detention beds; and
- to improve conditions and alleviate overcrowding in secure detention facilities.

> "EVERY MEASURE WE HAVE SUGGESTS THAT IN CHICAGO, PORTLAND, AND SACRAMENTO, JDAI ACHIEVED SIGNIFICANT REDUCTIONS IN DETENTION ADMISSIONS AND SIGNIFICANT IMPROVEMENTS IN THE CONDITIONS OF CONFINEMENT. AND THERE WERE NO INCREASES IN EITHER FAILURE-TO-APPEAR RATES OR PRETRIAL CRIME RATES."

Three JDAI sites completed the initiative's implementation phase — Cook, Multnomah, and Sacramento counties — and each had notable achievements in detention reform. "Every measure we have suggests that in Chicago, Portland, and Sacramento, JDAI achieved significant reductions in detention admissions and significant improvements in the conditions of confinement," says Barry Krisberg, president of the National Council on Crime and Delinquency (NCCD) and primary author of the final evaluation of JDAI, scheduled for release in early 2000. "And there were no increases in either failure-to-appear rates or pretrial crime rates. In fact, JDAI seemed to make things better, because kids were now getting better pretrial supervision."

---

[2] Cook County, Illinois; Milwaukee County, Wisconsin; Multnomah County, Oregon; New York City; and Sacramento County, California.

Despite the fairly straightforward case for improving pretrial detention policy and practice, reforming detention systems has proven very difficult. One reason is that diverse and autonomous juvenile justice agencies have to learn to work together in new ways. Another is that public safety and other politically charged issues embedded in detention reform are sensitive topics and sometimes immune to rational debate. A third reason is that adolescent youth who are charged with a crime, particularly kids of color, do not naturally attract public sympathy or attention. "These are the least favorite kids in America," says Mark Soler.

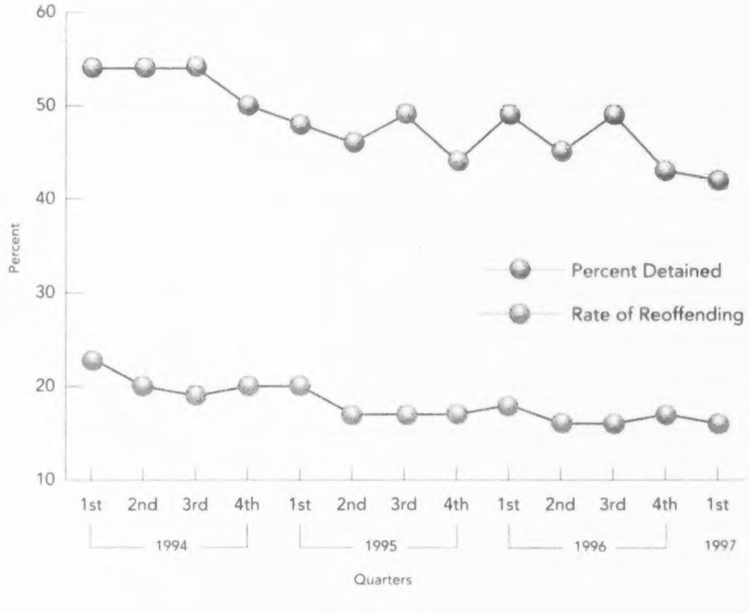
The report that follows is organized around JDAI's key detention reform strategies: collaborative planning and decision making, objective admissions practices, case processing innovations, and alternative programs. Also discussed are the sites' efforts to improve the conditions of confinement in detention centers and to reduce the disproportionate number of minorities incarcerated there. For more detailed analyses of the JDAI strategies and related topics, please refer to the Casey Foundation series *Pathways to Juvenile Detention Reform*, which began publication at the end of 1999 (see page 35).

By the Numbers

REDUCING DETENTION AND REOFFENDING IN SACRAMENTO COUNTY

JDAI seeks to demonstrate that jurisdictions can reduce the unnecessary and inappropriate use of secure juvenile detention without compromising public safety. In Sacramento, there have been decreases in both the percentage of alleged delinquents who were detained *and* the rate of reoffending by youth who were released to a parent or placed in an alternative program.

Source: Sacramento County Juvenile Justice Initiative Database



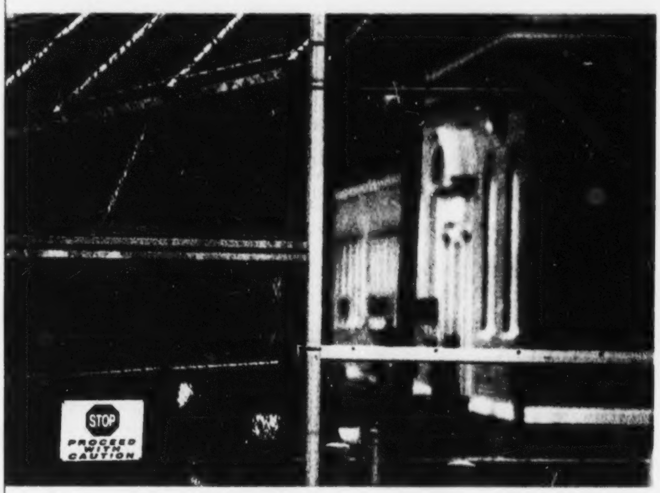
Collaboration: "A Gut Check"

Perhaps the most critical JDAI strategy was the commitment to collaborative planning and decision making among the agencies that constitute the juvenile justice system — the judiciary, prosecution, defense bar, police, probation, and others. One reason collaboration was essential is that the term "juvenile justice system" is something of an oxymoron. The agencies involved in it have a high degree of fiscal and operational autonomy as well as differing cultures and constituencies. The judiciary, for example, has an obligation to remain independent, and the roles of prosecutors and defense attorneys are, by definition, adversarial.

Despite their autonomy, juvenile justice agencies are also highly interdependent. In Cook County, for example, the county board of commissioners has legal responsibility for operating the juvenile detention center. The judiciary, on the other hand, decides which kids are sent there. Historically, such mutual interests were an insufficient inducement for Chicago's juvenile justice agencies to work together. "There was no collaboration prior to '94," says Michael Rohan, director of the county's Juvenile Probation and Court Services Department. "There were limited relationships between the agencies and players."

The collaborative environment was better in Sacramento, where juvenile justice agencies had worked together to address overcrowding in the county detention center, and in Portland, where the juvenile justice system was responding to a lawsuit over conditions of confinement in the juvenile lockup. Yet even in these jurisdictions, individuals and agencies still had a tendency to focus narrowly on their particular role in detention rather than on the overall system. "People have been doing things the same way for so long that getting them to reexamine the way you do business in juvenile court is very difficult," says Ingrid Swenson, a public defender in Multnomah County.

The Casey Foundation's JDAI grants, $2.25 million over three years for each site, were small compared to the budgets of the juvenile justice agencies in the three counties. The funds did, however, provide the opportunity for key stakeholders concerned about kids and their community to look at their system collectively, question one another, and, in the words of Talmadge Jones, former presiding juvenile court judge in Sacramento County, "examine whether our detention policies made real sense."



Such an examination prompted tough discussions within the collaboratives on such politically and emotionally charged issues as community safety, rights of the accused, and the most efficient use of public dollars. "We had some arguments, and we had some people storm out of meetings," recalls Michael Mahoney, president of the John Howard Association, a Chicago nonprofit organization that advocates for correctional reform. "But we kept it together."

A fundamental task of the collaboratives was to learn more about the kids in detention, what they were charged with, and how long they stayed. "We really didn't know who was in detention or why," says Rick Jensen, coordinator for the Detention Reform

Project in Multnomah County. The challenge of learning more about a jurisdiction's detention population was invariably hampered by inadequate and fragmented data systems. "There was not an integrated management information system in 1994," says Michael Rohan of Cook County. "Every department in the juvenile justice arena had a separate database."

Once the sites had a better picture of their detention populations, members of the JDAI collaboratives were in a better position to start "asking the 'why' questions," says Bart Lubow. "Why is this group here? What are they charged with? What public policy purpose does that serve?"

Although the legal basis for secure detention is narrow — to assure that young people appear in court and do not commit another offense — locked facilities are used for a broad range of purposes. One unauthorized use of pretrial detention is punishment — "a bite of the apple" — aimed at deterring future offending. There is little evidence that such an approach is effective and a great deal of research on the negative consequences of juvenile incarceration, particularly in overcrowded facilities. "Imposing punishment before a kid has been adjudicated is not legitimate," says Amy Holmes Hehn, the chief juvenile prosecutor in Multnomah County, "and I don't think it's constitutional."

Another unauthorized purpose of secure detention is its use as a 24-hour-per-day, seven-day-per-week dumping ground for children who have been failed by overburdened mental health and child welfare systems. In *Reforming Juvenile Detention: No More Hidden Closets*, Ira Schwartz, dean of the School of Social Work at the University of Pennsylvania, and William Barton, an associate professor at the Indiana University School of Social Work, write: "When families, neighborhoods, schools, and other programs no longer wish to deal with troubled children, the detention center is the one resource that cannot turn them away."

The struggle to reach consensus on the appropriate uses of pretrial detention forced members of the JDAI collaboratives to confront their philosophical and factual assumptions about detention. "It was doing a gut check on actual practices," says Cook County's Michael Rohan. "Had we somehow gotten to a point where we were holding kids who didn't need to be held?"

Admissions: "Yes or No?"

To make the consensus about pretrial detention operational, the JDAI sites had to develop objective policies and practices for admitting youth to secure confinement. As with the other detention reform strategies, each site developed its own tactics that reflected local values and conditions. "The fundamental issue about admissions," says Bart Lubow, "is changing arbitrary, subjective decisions to ones that are rational and objective and that make sense relative to the public policies you are trying to accomplish."

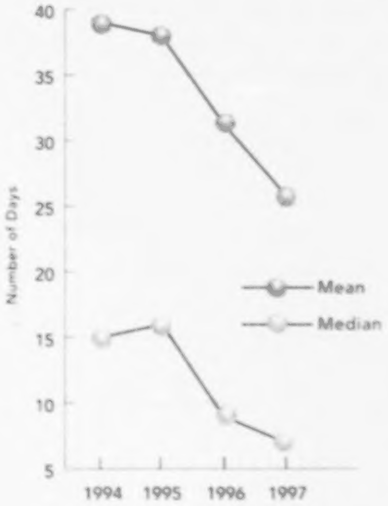
Eligibility Criteria. State or local admissions criteria define a jurisdiction's detention policy for police, judges, and intake staff at detention centers. "Admissions criteria are a cornerstone to any kind of detention reform, but they seem to be frequently overlooked," says Frank Orlando, director of the Center for the Study of Youth Policy at Nova Southeastern University Law School and a retired judge who led the detention reform effort in Broward County, Florida.

In 1989 the Florida state legislature adopted eligibility criteria for secure detention that were initially developed in Broward County. These guidelines limited locked detention to situations "where there is clear and compelling evidence that a child presents a danger to himself or the community, presents a risk of failing to appear, or is likely to commit a subsequent law violation prior to adjudication."

The legislation also specifically prohibited the use of secure pretrial detention for punishment or administrative convenience. In other words, young people charged with serious offenses could be detained, as well as youth who commit low-level

BY THE NUMBERS

IMPROVING CASE PROCESSING IN MULTNOMAH COUNTY



More efficient case processing is an administrative strategy to reduce unnecessary delays in each step of the juvenile justice process. The goal is a better system of juvenile justice, not just a quicker one. Multnomah County, a jurisdiction with a national reputation for prompt courts, has used a variety of techniques to reduce further case processing time for detained youth.

Source: Multnomah County TJIS Database

offenses and have other charges or a record of failing to appear in court. All others — including kids charged with status offenses, traffic violations, and low-level misdemeanors — were to be given a court summons and returned to a parent or guardian, or delivered to a local social service agency. In the first three years after Florida's legislative detention reforms, annual admissions to secure detention statewide decreased by 13 percent.

Like many states, California has a somewhat vague detention admissions statute that, in the words of one JDAI participant, "would admit a ham sandwich to detention." To develop more specific eligibility criteria for Sacramento County, the Juvenile Justice Initiative (the local JDAI effort) looked at detention guidelines throughout the country, then developed its own criteria to determine who should be brought to juvenile hall. "Based on offense and some other factors, we provided a one-page check sheet for law enforcement officers out in the field," says Yvette Woolfolk, project coordinator for the Juvenile Justice Initiative. "It helps them decide if they should bring that minor in for booking, or if that minor can be cited and released back to the parents."

Buy-in from local law enforcement was an essential part of developing the eligibility criteria. John Rhoads, then superintendent of the Sacramento Juvenile Hall and currently chief probation officer in Santa Cruz County, recalls police concerns that no guideline could cover every contingency in the field. "If you ever feel in doubt with anybody, go ahead and bring him," Rhoads responded. "We won't argue with you. We'll do our regular intake, and maybe we'll release him. But at least you got him out of the area, and we'll do what we have to do."

Objective Screening. "Risk-assessment instruments," or RAIs (pronounced "rays"), help probation officers, detention officials, and judges make objective decisions about detaining young people charged by police with delinquent acts: Who should be released to a parent or guardian? Who needs more formal supervision but could be served by an alternative program in the community? Who is a risk to public safety and needs to be locked up?

Before JDAI, the screening process for detaining kids in Cook County was haphazard. "Probation officers would be called by a police officer and asked to detain young people," says William Hibbler, a former presiding judge in the county's juvenile court and currently a federal judge. "The problem was that there were no objective standards for saying, 'Yes' or 'No.' If the officer was persuasive enough, the child would be locked up. If there was not room or the officer was not that persuasive, the child would not be locked up."

To make the detention screening process less arbitrary, each site developed RAIs that measure such variables as the seriousness of the alleged offense and the youth's prior record, probation status, and history of appearing for court. Administered by probation or detention-intake staff, RAIs classify whether a particular child is a low, moderate, or high risk to reoffend or fail to appear in court. The RAI score, in turn, helps determine the appropriate level of supervision a young person requires.

> "WHEN AN ARREST FOR AN ALLEGED OFFENSE IS FOLLOWED BY MONTHS OF INACTION BEFORE DISPOSITION, THE JUVENILE WILL FAIL TO SEE THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE TWO EVENTS. ANY LESSON THAT MIGHT BE LEARNED ABOUT ACCOUNTABILITY AND RESPONSIBILITY IS LOST."

As jurisdictions gain experience with their screening instruments, they continue to adjust them. "If failure-to-appear rates are too high, analysis can indicate which factors deserve higher points," writes Judge Orlando in a monograph on admissions policy and practice. "Similarly, if rearrest rates are extraordinarily low, it probably means that the system is too risk averse."[3]

Multnomah County is on the third version of its RAI and working on a fourth. "We've been pretty happy with the risk-assessment instrument that we developed," says Portland prosecutor Amy Holmes Hehn. "It still needs some work and some tweaking, but our reoffense rate for kids that are out of detention, awaiting trial, is pretty low. I think it's in the 13 percent range. And our failure-to-appear rate is really low. It's about 7 percent."

Rick Lewkowitz, the chief juvenile prosecutor in Sacramento County, also believes his county's RAI is "working fairly well." Yet he cautions against the "robotic" use of the screening instrument. As an example, he cites a first offense for a residential burglary, which might score relatively low on the RAI. The arresting officers, however, had information that the burglary was gang related and its purpose was to acquire guns. "It's such a serious offense and serious circumstances," says Lewkowitz, "that public safety requires [secure detention]."

Case Processing: "A New Way of Doing Business"

More efficient case processing is an administrative strategy to reduce unnecessary delays in each step of the juvenile justice process — arrest by police, referral to court intake, adjudication (judgment), and disposition (placement). For detained youth, prompt case processing reduces the time individual juveniles stay in secure detention and, consequently, overall detention populations. Efficient case processing also provides benefits in pretrial cases that are not detained. "When an arrest for an alleged offense is followed by months of inaction before disposition, the juvenile will fail to see the relationship between the two events," writes D. Alan Henry, executive director of the Pretrial Services Resource Center, in a monograph on case processing. "Any lesson that might be learned about accountability and responsibility is lost."[4]

---

[3] "Controlling the Front Gates: Effective Admissions Policies and Practices," Frank Orlando, Vol. 3, *Pathways to Juvenile Detention Reform*, Annie E. Casey Foundation.

In Cook County, nearly 40 percent of the alleged delinquents who were issued summonses in 1994, rather than detained, failed to appear for their court dates. One reason for this high rate was the typical eight-week interval between issuing a summons and the actual court date. By collectively analyzing the problem and discussing possible solutions, the JDAI project in Chicago made a few, relatively simple changes in case processing that reduced failure-to-appear rates by half.

One improvement was an automatic notification system that included written and telephone confirmation of court appearances. "It sounds so simple," says probation director Michael Rohan, "but it helped us." Another change was reducing the time between issuing a summons to a juvenile and his or her court appearance. "When a young person leaves the police station, those who are not detained know that they have to be in court three weeks after their arrest date," says Judge Hibbler. "They're given that date right there by the police department."

In Sacramento County, the wheels of justice also ground slowly for young people who were issued a summons but not detained. In some cases, two months might pass before the Probation Department called an alleged delinquent for an informal interview. County law enforcement officers were particularly concerned about kids who did not qualify for detention under the new eligibility criteria yet needed immediate attention. In response, the Sacramento County Juvenile Justice Initiative established an accelerated intake program, which enabled the Probation Department to respond to such cases in 48 hours.

Another case processing innovation in Sacramento, the Detention Early Resolution (DER) program, applied to youth who were held in juvenile hall for routine delinquency cases. By California statute, detained cases must be adjudicated within 15 days, with disposition ten days later. The day before a trial, the prosecution, defense, and others review the case and often resolve it through plea bargains instead of going to court. What about advancing the pretrial date? asked the county's chief juvenile prosecutor. This would reduce the amount of time kids spend in detention as well as the number of routine cases for which attorneys have to prepare fully.

To make the DER program work, a paralegal in the district attorney's office promptly assembles police reports, statements by witnesses, and related evidence, then distributes them. Complete and immediate discovery allows defense attorneys to assess whether charges against their clients are sustainable. The district attorney's office is required to make its best plea offer. And timely probation reports are prepared that enable prosecutors, defenders, and judges to make informed decisions about resolving the case.

Since the adoption of the DER program, the time for routine cases from first court appearance to disposition has been reduced from 25 days to five days. "That has lightened the trial schedule load," says Yvette Woolfolk, Sacramento County project coordinator, "and attorneys are better prepared for the more serious cases that they know are going to trial."

One way that Multnomah County improves case processing and reduces the unnecessary use of detention is through a process called Pretrial Placement Planning. When juveniles charged with delinquent acts are detained, the arresting police officers complete their reports the same day. The following morning, staff from the Department of Community Justice, the county's probation department, distribute police reports, RAI scores, and discovery to the defense attorney and prosecutor. At an 11:30 a.m. meeting that same day, representatives from probation, prosecution, and defense discuss the risks of reoffending or flight posed by the youth and possible detention alternatives. "We never discuss the case," says Rick Jensen. "We only discuss the kid's level of risk and viable options to detention."

---

[4] "Reducing Unnecessary Delay: Innovations in Case Processing," D. Alan Henry, Vol. 5, *Pathways to Juvenile Detention Reform*, Annie E. Casey Foundation.

At a 1:30 p.m. detention hearing, the Department of Community Justice makes a recommendation for either outright release to a parent or guardian, more structured supervision through a detention alternative program, or secure detention in the county's juvenile home. The district attorney or defense may dissent from the recommendation, but in almost every case the court accepts it. And usually by 3:30 p.m., the alleged delinquent is on his way to the appropriate pretrial placement.

"It couldn't have happened unless the prosecution, the defense, the probation agency, and the judges were willing to work together on a new way of doing business," says Bart Lubow. "And unless they all could see that they all win."

Detention Alternative "Jewels"

A key concept of JDAI is that "detention" is a continuum of supervision — not a building — that ranges from secure custody for dangerous youth to less restrictive options for kids who pose little risk of reoffending or flight. The three basic alternatives to detention are: home confinement with frequent unannounced visits and phone calls by probation officers or surrogates from nonprofit agencies; day reporting centers that provide more intensive oversight and structured activities; and shelters serving runaways, homeless children, and other youth who need 24-hour supervision.

In the early 1990s, Chicago — poet Carl Sandburg's "City of the big shoulders" — had one of the largest secure detention facilities in the country but no alternative programming for alleged delinquents. "The decision used to be either you locked them up or you sent them home," says Judge Hibbler.

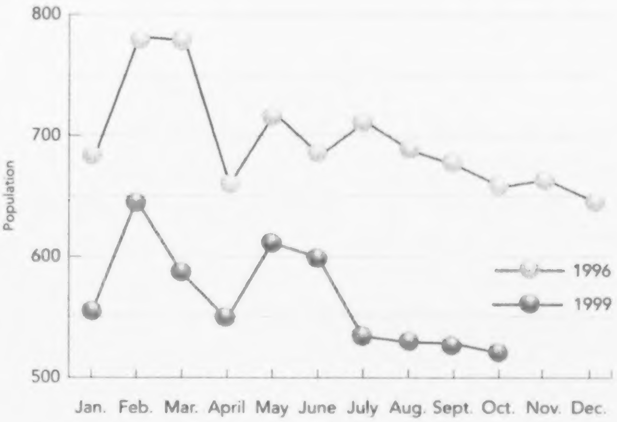
Today, Cook County has a range of detention alternatives that have reduced overcrowding in the Juvenile Temporary Detention Center and provided a more cost-effective way of preventing kids from getting into trouble before their court appearances. The programs, which include home confinement and shelters, have served more than 10,000 children since 1994. According to the Probation Department of Cook County, the average success rate of these programs — defined as the proportion of juveniles who remain arrest free during their term of placement — is more than 90 percent, with some programs having rates of more than 95 percent.

The "jewel" of Chicago's programs, according to Judge Hibbler, is the evening reporting center, a practical, community-based alternative that focuses on minors who would otherwise be detained for probation violations. Initially implemented by the Westside Association for Community Action (WACA) network, Chicago's six evening reporting centers operate from 3 p.m. to 9 p.m. — hours when working parents are not at home and kids are most likely to get into trouble.

Offering a range of educational and recreational

By the Numbers

COOK COUNTY JUVENILE TEMPORARY DETENTION CENTER AVERAGE POPULATION, 1996 AND 1999



Although the massive Juvenile Temporary Detention Center in Chicago has a rated capacity of 498 beds, its daily population frequently topped 700 in the mid-1990s. More objective, rational admissions standards, combined with the development of responsible alternative programs, have contributed to substantial reductions in the facility's average daily population.

Source: Cook County Juvenile Probation and Court Services Department

opportunities, the evening reporting centers provide transportation and a meal — both of which are occasions for informal counseling. "One of the things that's missing in the lives of so many youth," says Ernest Jenkins, chief executive officer of the WACA network, "is a meaningful relationship with an adult who really cares and really reaches out and shows that young person that he or she is important."

Chicago's evening reporting centers have served some 3,800 youth, 92 percent of whom were arrest free during their tenure in the program. Paul DeMuro, a former juvenile justice administrator and currently a private consultant, notes the importance of weaving juvenile justice institutions into the fabric of neighborhoods where the youth live. The evening reporting centers, says DeMuro, have been "well accepted by judges and probation and the community."

In downtown Portland, a magnet for runaways and homeless youth, the police were annually arresting some 1,500 juveniles for minor offenses and taking them to the county's detention center. Because they did not meet the state's eligibility criteria for detention, the youth were soon released, wasting the time of police and intake staff, and ignoring the underlying needs of the children.

An imaginative public-private partnership in Multnomah County led to the establishment of the Youth Reception Center at Portland's Central Police Precinct. Operated by New Avenues for Youth, a nonprofit social service agency, the center is open 24 hours per day, seven days a week. "Kids are triaged so their immediate needs such as shelter and food and medical attention and clothing are arranged," says project coordinator Rick Jensen. "Then the following day or so, the youth is provided a case manager to get the kid back home and back into school or treatment."

In Sacramento County, about 80 percent of the young people diverted from secure detention are placed in the Home Supervision Program. Targeting low-risk youth, the program restricts young people to their homes unless accompanied by a parent or guardian. Probation officers make daily visits to ensure compliance with home detention policies. Depending on a variety of factors, moderate-risk youth may be required to wear an ankle bracelet with a tracking transmitter and to remain at home at all times unless granted permission by the court. "Ankle monitoring," says prosecutor Rick Lewkowitz, "is very difficult to violate and not get caught."

One challenge posed by new detention alternatives is the likelihood that they will end up serving kids for whom the programs were not intended — "widening the net" in the jargon of juvenile justice and child welfare reform. One could argue that in an urban environment with many unmet needs and limited resources, a variety of kids could potentially benefit from structured supervision. On the other hand, a community committed to keeping the detention population within bounds must exercise some discipline in the use of alternatives to secure confinement. "If you open up ten alternative spots, you're never going to get precisely ten reductions in detention," says Paul DeMuro. He believes that six or seven reductions in confinement for every ten new alternative spots is a more realistic expectation.

OVERCROWDED DETENTION CENTERS ARE DANGEROUS AND UNHEALTHY PLACES WITH HIGH RATES OF INJURIES TO JUVENILES AND STAFF.

Conditions: "We've Come A Long Way"

Conditions of confinement in detention centers and the appropriate use of detention alternatives are inextricably linked. Overcrowded detention centers are dangerous and unhealthy places with high rates of injuries to juveniles and staff. In the words of a young woman detained in Sacramento, "When there are too many girls in here, we get all up in each others' faces."

On the other hand, if a jurisdiction can manage its detention population, it is possible to provide professional care for young people who should be locked up. "The kinds of treatment kids get in detention can have an impact on them for a very long period of time, either positively or negatively," says Mark Soler of the Youth Law Center. "There are situations where kids have developed good values or have come into contact with role models in detention. There are situations where they have gotten into educational programs that may be the best they have ever had."

Committed to the belief that jurisdictions have a constitutional obligation to provide reasonable care and custody for detained youth, the Casey Foundation required periodic inspections of its grantees' detention centers by independent assessment teams. "Facilities in the sites remained remarkably open to this ongoing scrutiny and responded by making significant improvements in conditions and institutional practices," writes Susan L. Burrell, an attorney with the Youth Law Center and author of a monograph on conditions of confinement.[5]

At the beginning of JDAI, Multnomah County was under a federal court order for operating a detention facility that did not meet constitutional standards of care. The county replaced the old detention center with an attractive new facility that has a rated capacity of 191 beds. The changes in the Donald E. Long juvenile home, however, were not merely cosmetic. The facility reduced its traditional reliance on locked room time for disruptive youth, some of whom had mental health problems and were almost always isolated behind closed doors. In addition to engaging mental health professionals in special programs for kids with behavioral problems, the detention center enhanced its education programs, improved training for staff, and introduced a behavior management program that rewarded positive behavior by young people.

---

[5] "Improving Conditions of Confinement in Secure Juvenile Detention Centers," Susan L. Burrell, Vol. 6, *Pathways to Juvenile Detention Reform*, Annie E. Casey Foundation.

Perhaps the largest improvements in conditions of confinement were made in Sacramento County's Juvenile Hall. In the early 1990s, the detention center was badly overcrowded, and the staff maintained order by relying heavily on lock downs and pepper spray, a painful chemical agent that causes temporary blindness, choking, and nausea. The detention center's staff members "were at war with their kids," says Paul DeMuro, a member of the Sacramento inspection team.

John Rhoads, then superintendent of the facility, clearly recalls the day that DeMuro and Mark Soler of the Youth Law Center made a preliminary report on their findings: "Paul DeMuro started out saying, 'This is a clean and well lit facility, but....' And then they went on to list a host of issues in their minds that we needed to address. My staff and I were taken aback and somewhat angry over this assault on our beautiful institution."

Although temporarily stung by the report, Rhoads and his staff set out to make every improvement that was within their power. There were more than 30 specific issues to address — including meals, mental health services, and educational opportunities — but the underlying problem of the Sacramento County Juvenile Hall was its punitive culture. "Everything," says Rhoads, "was based on negative sanctions."

One element of changing that culture was the adaptation of a behavior modification program developed at New York City's Spofford Juvenile Detention Center. The program, which basically awards points for good behavior and deducts them for bad, enables kids who do well in school, clean their room, and stay out of trouble to redeem their points for sodas, snacks, and other small items and privileges. "All the kids understood it," says Bart Lubow. "And it works."

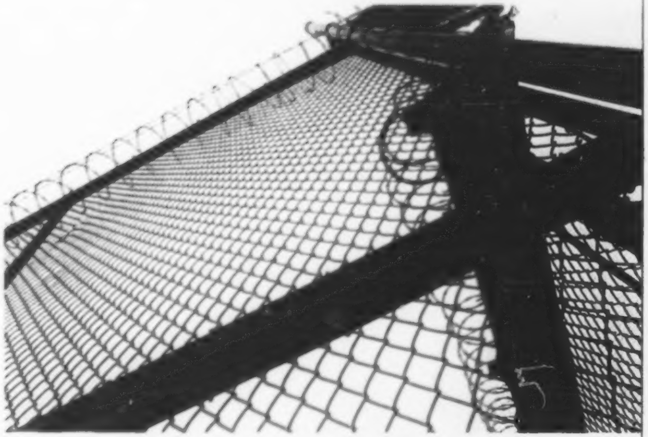
By retraining staff, increasing mental health resources, and making other changes, Rhoads and his staff were able to turn around Sacramento's Juvenile Hall. "It had really changed from a prison-like environment to a place that was really a youth-oriented facility," says Mark Soler.

The Cook County Juvenile Temporary Detention Center, occupying two adjoining buildings on the west side of Chicago, is a massive facility with a total capacity of 498 beds. After many years of below-capacity operation, the facility consistently began to exceed its rated capacity in the early 1990s, with daily detention populations frequently topping 700. Other problems with the detention center included frequent lock downs and "some hitting of kids," says Paul DeMuro. Because of the facility's size, "the line staff were left to their own devices to do what they wanted to do."

About the time JDAI began its implementation phase, Cook County recruited a new superintendent for the detention center, Jesse Doyle, a detention reform advocate and a former administrator at Spofford. According to inspections by the Youth Law Center, Cook County made significant improvements in such areas as mental health care, training and supervision of staff, and the physical plant itself. There were also reductions in overcrowding. In 1996 the average daily population at the detention center was 692. For the the first ten months of 1999, that average was 565.

> "THE FUNDAMENTAL ISSUE ABOUT ADMISSIONS IS CHANGING ARBITRARY, SUBJECTIVE DECISIONS TO ONES THAT ARE RATIONAL AND OBJECTIVE AND THAT MAKE SENSE RELATIVE TO THE PUBLIC POLICIES YOU ARE TRYING TO ACCOMPLISH."

The likelihood that Cook County's detention center has room for further improvement is suggested by a lawsuit filed by the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) on June 15, 1999. The lawsuit charges that the facility is overcrowded, understaffed, and chronically mismanaged. The result, the ACLU charges, is "a frightening, punitive, and dangerous environment for youths."



Although the courts will ultimately decide whether the conditions of confinement in Cook County are constitutional, several JDAI consultants and participants from Chicago say that the ACLU lawsuit more accurately reflects the conditions of several years ago, rather than the present. "I think we've come a long way on the conditions," says Michael Mahoney of the John Howard Association.

Disproportionate Confinement: "Limited Success"

A disproportionate number of minority youth are held in secure detention nationwide. African-American children, for example, who constitute about 15 percent of the population under age 18, made up 30 percent of the juvenile cases processed and 45 percent of the cases detained in 1996. "The degree of minority overrepresentation in secure detention far exceeds the rates of minority offending," says Bart Lubow.

The disproportionate confinement of minorities is the cumulative consequence of individual decisions made at each point in the juvenile justice process — from the practices of police officers, who make the first decision about releasing or locking up kids, to the assessments of probation officers, judges, and others who determine the risks posed by a youth. "At each stage of the juvenile justice process, there's a slight empirical bias," says Jeffrey Butts of the Urban Institute. "And the problem is that the slight empirical bias at every stage of decision making accumulates throughout the whole process. By the time you reach the end, you have virtually all minorities in the deep end of the system."

The causes of this bias are often "very subtle," according to NCCD's Barry Krisberg. Many detention decisions, for example, are based on perceptions of the fitness of families and the strengths within communities — perceptions that in some cases may be true and in others false. "If you think there are no assets, your default [decision] will be, 'Well, bring the kid to juvenile hall, and we'll figure out what to do,' " says Krisberg. "If you're operating in a community where you think there are a lot of resources, a lot of help, a lot of care, you're going to do something very different."

Although none of the JDAI sites can claim victory over the problem of disproportionate minority confinement, there is evidence of progress. The objective screening measures in Multnomah County, for example, have changed the odds that minority youth who arrive at court intake are more likely to be admitted to secure custody than white children. "Kids of color, particularly black kids, are coming to the doors of our system at higher rates than they should be," says prosecutor Amy Holmes Hehn. "But it appears to us that when they get here, the decision making is pretty even handed in terms of bias."

Sacramento County has also made decision making about detention more equitable once young people arrive at juvenile hall. In addition to using objective screening measures for detained youth, the Sacramento Juvenile Justice Initiative instituted training programs to help eliminate personal and institutional bias in decision making. "There is no longer that growing impact on minority youth going through our system," says Gerry Root, director of planning and public information for Sacramento Superior Court. "It's no longer a cumulative effect at each decision point through our system."

The difficulty that officials, agencies, and communities have in frankly addressing the issue of disproportionate minority confinement would be hard to overestimate. The combustible mixture of race, crime, and justice makes the topic a discomforting one that many people would rather not discuss. Yet participants in all of the JDAI sites are convinced that such dialogue is essential. "What you have to do, and we've had limited success," says Michael Rohan of Cook County, "is challenge every policy and every program by virtue of open discussion. Is there any inadvertent or inherent bias [in the system]?"

"The Big Picture"

One of the major challenges of JDAI — or any initiative aimed at reforming a complex public system — is sustaining the collaboration of agencies and individuals that is essential to success. Collaboration is time consuming, and individual agencies often cede a measure of their own discretion in the interest of the common good. "There are a lot of down sides [to collaboration] if you are just looking at it from a very narrow view," says Sacramento County prosecutor Rick Lewkowitz. "But in terms of the big picture, everybody benefits. The system benefits, and the kids and public benefit."

The challenge of leadership — which in a collaborative environment is less about being the boss and more about presenting a vision, keeping people focused, and moving forward — becomes particularly acute as members of JDAI governing bodies naturally rotate on and off over time. Chicago's Michael Rohan says he is particularly proud that the reform effort was "not driven by one personality or one force. It's pretty much shared values throughout our juvenile justice system. That's what's made it work."

For public defender Ingrid Swenson and her colleagues in Multnomah County, institutionalizing detention reform — "to make it part of the way we do business" — has been a major goal. "For the most part, I think that has happened," she says.

One setback for Multnomah County was statewide legislation that made it mandatory for youth charged with some 20 different offenses to be tried as adults and to be detained automatically for approximately 100 days before trial. Although these juveniles could not be released to a parent or an alternative program, Multnomah County has applied its screening instrument to them and found that many posed little risk of flight or reoffending. Reflecting on Oregon and other states, Judge Orlando says: "We're still detaining a lot of kids around the country based on legislative mandates, as opposed to what data and research prove is more effective and saves the public a lot of money."

Perhaps the biggest challenge of JDAI was the simple reality that in the 1990s encouraging rational debate about detention policy and practice was to invite charges of being "soft on crime." In his 1996 book *Killer Kids*, New York City juvenile prosecutor Peter Reinharz made the absurd accusation that JDAI "is designed to ensure that every offender has

PATHWAYS TO JUVENILE DETENTION REFORM

TO DOCUMENT THE INNOVATIONS AND EXPERIENCES OF SITES in the Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative, the Annie E. Casey Foundation recently began publishing a series of monographs called **Pathways to Juvenile Detention Reform.** Written by administrators, researchers, and other juvenile justice authorities, 11 of the volumes focus on key components of detention reform. A report on replicating the Broward County reforms statewide and a journalist's account of JDAI are also included in the series.

The **Pathways** volumes are:

Overview. *The JDAI Story: Building a Better Detention System* by Rochelle Stanfield

1. *Planning for Juvenile Detention Reforms: A Structured Approach* by David Steinhart
2. *Collaboration and Leadership in Juvenile Detention Reform* by Kathleen Feely
3. *Controlling the Front Gates: Effective Admissions Policies and Practices* by Frank Orlando
4. *Consider the Alternatives: Planning and Implementing Detention Alternatives* by Paul DeMuro
5. *Reducing Unnecessary Delay: Innovations in Case Processing* by D. Alan Henry
6. *Improving Conditions of Confinement in Secure Juvenile Detention Centers* by Susan L. Burrell
7. *By the Numbers: The Role of Data and Information in Detention Reform* by Deborah Busch
8. *Ideas and Ideals to Reduce Disproportionate Detention of Minority Youth* by Eleanor Hinton Hoytt and Brenda V. Smith
9. *Special Detention Cases: Strategies for Handling Difficult Populations* by David Steinhart
10. *Changing Roles and Relationships in Detention Reform* by Malcolm Young
11. *Promoting and Sustaining Detention Reforms* by Robert G. Schwartz
12. *Replicating Detention Reform: Lessons From the Florida Detention Initiative* by Donna M. Bishop and Pamala L. Griset

For additional information about the **Pathways** series or the Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative, contact:

The Annie E. Casey Foundation
701 St. Paul Street
Baltimore, MD 21202
Phone: 410.547.6600
Fax: 410.547.6624
www.aecf.org

the maximum opportunity to victimize New York." And in Sacramento, a local television news reporter found it troubling that JDAI opposed the "inappropriate use of juvenile detention."

Such comments reflected a public policy and media environment that was extremely hostile to juvenile justice reform. Although juvenile crime, including violent crime, has been declining since 1993, the juvenile justice system has been subjected to unprecedented attacks, particularly for its alleged inability to cope with a new generation of so-called "superpredators." Helping to demonize young people, particularly children of color, and to persuade lawmakers to pass increasingly harsh juvenile justice legislation, the superpredator turned out to be a mythological creature. "[I]t is clear," write the authors of *Juvenile Offenders and Victims: 1999 National Report*, "that national crime and arrest statistics provide no evidence for a new breed of juvenile superpredator."

In Chicago, Portland, and Sacramento, the juvenile justice agencies have come together to deal with the real issues in detention — community safety, objective appraisals of the risks posed by alleged delinquents, a range of alternatives to meet their varying supervision needs, and the most effective use of limited public resources. "We need to make sure we are intervening appropriately with the right kids at the right level," says Amy Holmes Hehn. "And we need to try to use data to drive that decision making, rather than just whim or emotion or gut reaction."

Bill Rust is the editor of ADVOCASEY.

FIRST-CLASS

The Annie E. Casey Foundation
701 St. Paul Street
Baltimore, Maryland 21202
Phone: 410.547.6600
Fax: 410.547.6624
www.aecf.org

The Annie E. Casey Foundation

701 St. Paul Street
Baltimore, MD 21202

Art Direction/Design: Kathryn Shagas
Charts: Joanne Cooper, Kathryn Shagas
Production: Theresa Williams, Alpha Graphics
Illustrations: David Suter

Photography:
Tony Stone Images (cover)
Lorin Klaris (pp. 4–5, 14)
Susie Fitzhugh (pp. 7, 13)
Bill Denison (pp. 24–34)
Seeking Solutions with Hedrick Smith (pp. 18–19)

BEST COPY AVAILABLE